SWAMI NIRMALANANDA: HIS LIFE AND MISSION



THULASEETHEERTHAN

SRI RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMA KAYAMKULAM

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Dedicated
at the feet of
BHAGAVAN SRI SRI RAMAKRISHNA,
in memory of
my son, MURALI
(Dr. M. Muralidharan, M.A., Ph.D.,
Dept. of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University,
Kottayam, Kerala.)
who passed away
at the early age of thirty eight
on the Sixteenth of December 1995.

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE



WAMI NIRMALANANDA: HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS, published by Swami Vishadananda from Sri Ramakrishna Niranjan Ashrama, Ottapalam in 1943 is the only book of its kind in English on the life and work of the Swamiji that I know of. A few years later, the same publisher brought out a book in Malayalam on the same subject entitled SRI RAMAKRISHNA KIRANAM. No doubt, it is based on the earlier book in English but it also attempts to examine in greater depth the significance of the Swamiji's life and teachings with analytical commentaries on them. Another book in Malayalam intended as a centenary tribute to the Swamiji was published in 1964, by Thulaseetheerthan in the form of the reminiscences of Swami Nirmalananda by some of his intimate disciples and devotees.

SWAMI NIRMALANANDA: A DISCIPLE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA, another book in English, on the Swamiji, was published by Brahma Gopal Dutt from Calcutta in 1991. Its contents, character and purpose were different from the other books; yet, it threw much light on many aspects of the Swamiji's life and personality. These publications, particularly the one in English by Swami Vishadananda,

have been the source books for the present work entitled, SWAMI NIRMALANANDA: HIS LIFE AND MISSION.

The excuse as well as defence for bringing out this book is that no copy of SWAMI NIRMALANANDA: HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS is now available when there is an increasing demand from several quarters for an authentic book on the life and work of the Swamiji. Every care is taken to make this book authentic and authoritative by being faithful to the principal source book. The problem in preparing the manuscript has been in condensing the available materials by omitting the elaborate and ornamental details without the risk of the subject suffering in dignity or appeal. The only addition is REMINISCENCES in Part III of the book which is largely translations into English of a dozen write-ups in Malayalam from the centenary publication by Tulaseetheerthan.

Tulaseethærthan who has written this book is one of the few disciples of Tulasi Maharaj still alive. His whole family was fortunate to be blessed by the Swamiji. It was his father who had offered to the Swamiji the three-acre plot of land for the Niranjan ashrama, Ottapalam. His sister, Swami Bodhananda was an inmate of the Sarada Ashrama, Ottapalam for a good thirty years. Had it not been for a series of misfortunes that had befallen the writer, this book would have been ready for release about this time in 1995. I am glad, however, that it was got ready for release at all, though late by two years. It is indeed a great fortune that this book is published on December 13th, 1997, on the 134th birthday (*Punya tithi*) of Swami Nirmalanandaji.

It is now more than half a century since the first book on the life and teachings of the Swamiji was published. Most of his elder disciples and devotees if not all of them, have left the world. Even his beloved *children* are now in their late sixties or early seventies. It is natural and inevitable but sad that death has claimed so many of his disciples and devotees who were worthy instruments in his hands for Sri Gurumaharaj's work. On this occasion, one gratefully remembers all of them, monastic as well as householder disciples of the Swamiji. Bowing my head in all devotion and humility before their sacred memory, I place this book on Tulasi Maharaj in the hands of the readers.

Before I conclude, I hasten to place on record my sense of profound gratitude to Dr. V.S. Sharma, retired Professor and Head of the Malayalam Department, Kerala University for readily agreeing to introduce this book to the reading public with his excellent FOREWORD, and to the many devotees who helped the publication with their liberal donations but who wanted to remain anonymous without their names getting into print.

Kayamkulam, 13 - 12 - 1997 Saturday. SWAMI KAIVALYANANDA.

President,

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama,

Kayamkulam.



FOREWORD

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In all humility, let me quote the words of tribute paid to Swami Nirmalanandaji.

"It is nearly twenty seven years since Swami Nirmalanandaji, a Chela and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Deva has been working in South India. No report of it was presented to the public till now for the Swamiji has never liked his name to be brought into the limelight. A true chlid of Sri Ramakrishna that he is, he has never courted name and fame. He was simply content to carry on Sri Bhagavan's work silently and unostentatiously." (Extract from "Report of the Sri Ramakrishna Movement in South India", published by `Prabuddha Keralam', Trivandrum, in 1936.)

Except for some news items and reports, now and then, on Thulasi Maharaj's visit to Kerala in 'Prabuddha Keralam', no authentic record of the life and activities of the Swamiji was published till 1943. Then, Swami Vishadanandaji of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Ottapalam, published 'The Life and Teachings of Swami Nirmalananda' which is the source of this new book on Thulasi Maharaj. Another book on Swami Nirmalandaji was published in 1991 by Shri Brahma Gopal Dutt of Calcutta entitled "Nirmalananda-

Thulasi Maharaj- A Direct Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna- A Focus on Facts and Facets", the purpose of which was different.

I have great pleasure in introducing this book entitled "Swami Nirmalananda: His Life and Mission", which is prepared by a distinguished Professor, an ardent devotee of the Swamiji, who prefers to be known as `Thulaseetheerthan'. At the very outset, let me congratulate the author for the strenuous job he has undertaken.

I was very much delighted when Swami Kaivalyanandaji, President of Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Kayamkulam, and publisher of this book, wanted me to write a Foreword for it. Pausing awhile to ponder over my worthiness to introduce the book to the reading public, I discovered that Sri Ramakrishna was my Chosen Ideal and Swami Vivekananda my Life's Hero. In fact, I had even written a book on the Vedantic Teacher of the age and another on his Irish disciple, Sister Nivedita. All this was possible because, my beloved father the late Sahitya Bhushanam P.S. Vasudeva Sharma and myself, belonged to the larger family of the Children of Sri Ramakrishna. This was due to the great influence of the late Sri. P. Seshadri Iyer who himself was drawn to Sri Ramakrishna and His message by the magnetic personality of Swami Nirmalanandaji. That subdued influence along with my own humble background provided me with enough confidence to write a few words as an introduction to this book.

Written in an eminently readable style, 'Swami Nirmalananda;
His Life and Mission' is divided into three parts --

(a) The Swamiji's Life and Work as an apostle of Sri Ramakrishna,

- (b) His Letters, Lectures and Conversations, and
- (c) Reminiscences of the Swamiji by some of his prominent disciples and devotees who had come into intimate contact with him.

The book is an excellent, in-depth study of Thualsi Maharaj's long life of Seventy five summers, dedicated to the cause of spreading his Master's message with self-denying zeal and singleness of purpose. It highlights his many-sided personality of incomparable purity, power and charm. Reading the book, I could not resist the conclusion that the Swamiji's life and work in later years had assumed the dimension of an elaborate paraphrase of Swami Vivekananda's unerring judgement on his beloved gurubhai's unique personality:

"Look at Thulasi. A sadhu should be like him. He has a very fine head and a very strong body. He works indefatigably, days and nights; he also immerses himself in meditation for long hours. He can sing well and play on musical instruments. He can expound Shashtras, hold conversations, give lectures and cook well! You should be all-round like him".

Thulasi Maharaj was all these - and more. More because he was a wonderful organizer, and an able missionary and a spiritual master of astonishing enchantment and love about which the illustrious Swamiji Maharaj was silent. 'Swami Nirmalananda: His Life and Mission' admirably illustrates these aspects of the Swamiji's personality as well. Very few apostles of Sri Ramakrishna have travelled so widely and so frequently for spreading His message. Very few senior Sanyasins of the Order had inspired such large numbers to become devoted followers of Sri Ramakrishna. And it

was given to Thulasi Maharaj to become the guru of the largest number of brahmacharins and Sanyasins besides hundreds of house holder disciples, especially in Kerala. His mere presence was enough to draw crowds of devotees to the ashrama, be it in the North or in the South, and make it hum with activity in the form of conversations, question- and - answer sessions, scripture classes and discussions and training in meditation. His visits were indeed days of religious festivity!

This was nowhere more evident than in Kerala where the Swamiji laboured hard for a good quarter of a century to spiritually awaken its people with the life-giving message of Sri Ramakrishna. The present book brings into focus this significant facet of Swamiji's missionary life. In spite of 'same - sightedness' which was natural to him, the Swamiji looked upon Kerala and its people as his own demanding his special care and attention. And it was on them that he lavished his accumulated spiritual wealth abundantly. Before Thulasi Maharaj's first visit to Kerala in 1911, there were only a few Ramakrishna enthusiasts in a few places where they celebrated His Jayanthi as best as they could. They could hardly think of anything like some sort of organized work in spreading the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna which only the so-called educated urban elite was familiar with.

'Swami Nirmalananda: His Life and Mission' maps out in picturesque style how the Swamiji built the temple of Sri Ramakrishna in Kerala brick by brick from its strong foundation to its shining dome. At the time of his Mahasamadhi in 1938, he had left behind him sixteen Ramakrishna ashramas, thirty two sanyasi disciples, a large number of brahmacharins and inmates in the ashramas and

hundreds of house holder disciples and devotees to carry on the work that he had started from scratch. He had also left 'Prabuddha Keralam', the monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam, in excellent working condition. Above all, he made Sri Ramakrishna a household name in Kerala by 'installing' Him in the homes and hearts of hundreds of devotees.

It was Thulasi Maharaj who pioneered the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala and nursed it to such rich fruitfulness that in dignity and efficiency it stood second only to its counterpart in Bengal. The Swamiji once described himself as 'Sri Ramakrishna's Kakabhusundi'! Very true that he had to plough a long and lone furrow when all but one or two of his *gurubhais* had left the world. But only 'Sri Ramakrishna's Kakabhusundi' could go on with the work to that extent, with untired feet and unwearied heart, with utter dedication and unflinching devotion to Sri Guru Maharaj!

Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj chose Kerala not only as the field of his missionary activity during the closing phase but also his final nesting place. "Kerala is a fine place", he told a devotee and continued, "My soul is there. I thirst to return to Kerala. That is my place". When we know that Swami Nirmalanandji Maharaj is the only disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to spend his last days and finally give up his body in Kerala, his words of love for us assume a more than prophetic significance. For the spiritual awakening of Kerala, he was glad to bequeth his body and soul. No spiritual teacher had given us half as much as what Tulasi Maharaj had for our uplift and we could have asked for nothing more from him.

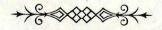
When I finished reading, 'Swami Nirmalananda: His Life and Mission', I felt as if I was all along in the holy company of a spiritual

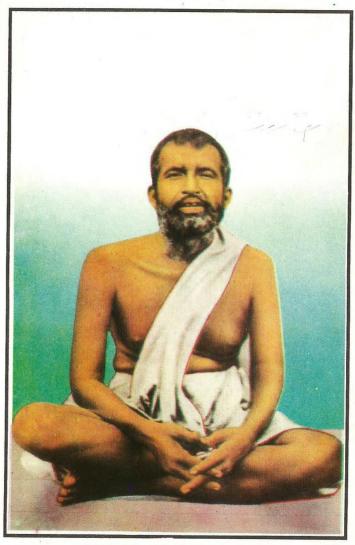
master of rare calibre, an awakener of souls full of the warmth of human love, an altogether stupendous personality of great heights and depths. No devotee of Sri Ramakrishna from Kerala can stand outside his pervasive influence, for the Ramakrishna movement in this part of the land has been his making, his gift to us. This well documented book truly throws a flood of light on the life and mission of Swami Nirmalanandji Maharaj besides giving an authentic account of the origin and development of the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala. Unquestionably, this book is a valuable and welcome addition to the Ramakrishna literature and I am sure that the reading public will accept this volume with all their heart and soul.

Jai Sri Sadguru Maharaj Ki Jai!

10.07.1997 Niveditha, Sasthamangalam, Trivandrum - 10.

DR.V.S.SHARMA

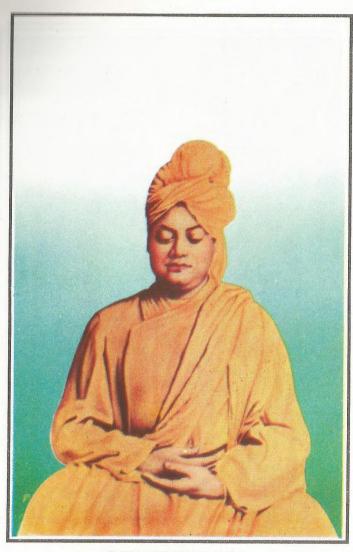




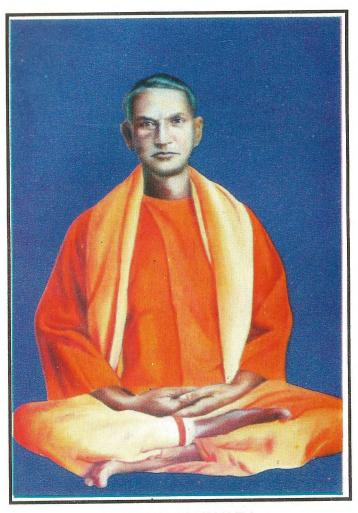
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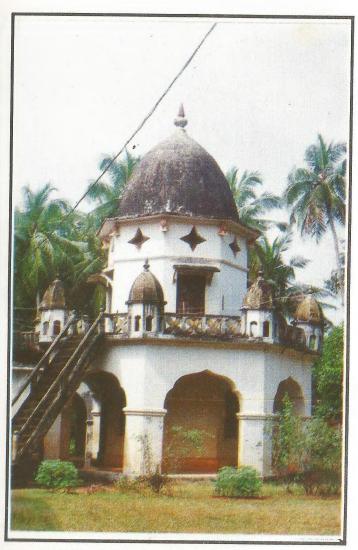
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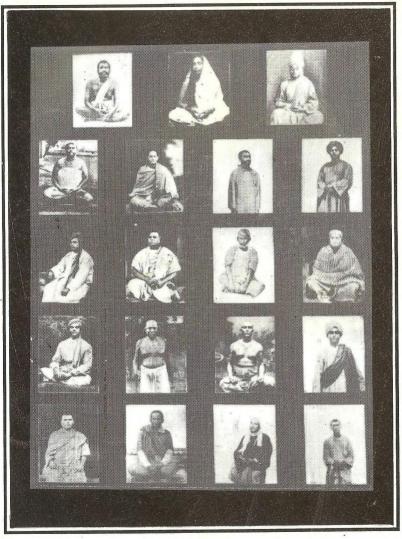
SWAMI BRAHMANANDA AND SWAMI NIRMALANANDA



SWAMI NIRMALANANDA MEMORIAL TEMPLE OTTAPALAM.



MONUMENT ERECTED AT THE PLACE WHERE SWAMI NIRMALANANDA'S BODY WAS CREMATED.



Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, Swami Vivekananda Swami Brahmanandaji, Swami Premanandaji, Swami Yoganandaji, Swami Niranjanandaji Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, Swami Saradanandaji, Swami Adbhudanandaji, Swami Shivanandaji Swami Abhedanandaji, Swami Advaitanandaji, Swami Turiyanandaji, Swami Subodhanandaji Swami Thrigunateetanandaji, Swami Akhandanandaji, Swami Vijnananandaji, Swami Nirmalanandaji

Lave no doubt about that. I shall take some rest in the Himalayan region, and then burst on the country everywhere like an avalanche ".

- Swami Vivekananda.



Look at Tulasi. A Sadhu should be like him. He has got a very fine head and a very strong body. He works indefatigably days and nights; he can immerse himself in meditation for long hours. He can sing well and play on musical instruments. He can expound shastras, hold conversations, give lectures and cook well. You should be all-round like him ".

- Swami Vivekananda



Let Sri Guru Maharaj's will be done. I am to work and obey his command to my last breath. No question, no flinching. Absolute submission".

- Swami Nirmalananda.



Kerala is a fine place . My soul is there . I thirst to return to Kerala. That is my place".

- Swami Nirmalananda.



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LIFE AND MISSION



THE SUPREME INCARNATION

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t was Swami Vivekananda's return to India in 1897 and his stirring call to the nation from Colombo to Almora to 'arise, awake and stop not, till the goal is reached', rather than his triumph at the Parliament o Religions in Chicago, that shook the people from their long sleep. His n an-making, life-giving message inspired even men of clay to be truly heroic. The Swamiji's lion-roar awakened them into a new awareness that they were the inheritors of a religio-spiritual culture, unique in world-history. He made the people realise with a compelling force and urgency that India would be immortal as long as her supreme concern in life continued to cherish and preserve the freedom of the Spirit at the cost of everything else.

The reason for the people of India clinging to spiritual wisdom with a singleness of purpose, the Swamiji pointed out, was that this ancient land of ours continued to enjoy the tradition of being the *punya bhoomi* of the world, perpetually watered by the holy Ganges of spirituality. This blessed land of ours was the cradle of religion and philosophy, the playground of innumerable sages and saints, world-teachers and godmen. If India were to lose her age-old spiritual wisdom, it would be

catastrophic for the whole world, for then life would be bereft of all ideality and moral excellence. It would be no better than a cannibal island or a forest of brutes where the human soul would have to be sacrificed at the altar of savagery and sensuality.

Time and again, incarnations like Rama and Krishna, Buddha and Sankara had chosen this holy land for their earthly sojourn. Each time, the divine advent had been for weaning away the worldly-minded souls from perdition to sanity and self-enlightenment. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, India presented a picture of cultural crisis of such magnitude that only a god-incarnate could set matters right. And God did come this time, assuming the name and form of Sree Ramakrishna whose Gospel was that human life would find its fulfilment only by divinising it by means of spiritual discipline.

The descent of God into the midst of men is for their ascent to divinity which is their true nature. He fulfils this mission by strengthening the divine tendencies in man. A God-man with his pure and peerless life imperceptibly draws even the wayward and the listless towards himself and the path of virtue and righteousness. A Buddha or a Christ was such a spiritual magnet, an exemplar of the life divine who could transform the lives of the people from worldliness to godliness by His mere presence.

Sree Rama was the embodiment of truth and righteousness. He was truly heroic in that never once did he swerve from the path of virtuous honour. He was a king, a hero-soul, an ideal man; all the same, he was essentially human, sharing the joys and sorrows common to all mankind. Sree Krishna, on the other hand, freely revealed the splendour of His divinity in all sorts of ways from the day of His advent. Yet, His divinity was always humane and full of love. He was the friend of the lowliest, was incorrigibly playful, even mischievous beyond His years. Sree Krishna was not a king like Sree Rama; but He was greater than all the kings: He was the king-maker. Full of worldly wisdom, He was at the same time the greatest world-teacher of spirituality. He was all these and more - a many - splendoured miracle of man and God.

Sree Ramakrishna, however, had neither the kingliness of Sree Rama nor the many sidedness of Sree Krishna. He walked among men like a king in disguise. To any ordinary observer, His life of fifty summers appeared singularly uneventful. Yet, to Swami Vivekananda who was most eminently qualified to judge his Master's divinity, Sree Ramakrishna was 'greater than all the past incarnations'. It was with the expressive

epithet, *Avataara - Varishtha* that he had described the spiritual grandeur of Sree Ramakrishna. He 'was the noblest incarnation', 'not just superior' to the others but indeed the 'supreme'.

Time, it is said, swallows up everything including the life and teachings of even the greatest of god-men. Involvement with the world of matter makes men forget their allegiance to things spiritual. Religious practices become meaningless rituals or they fall into disuse. Systems of philosophy become imprecise and conflicting. A life of moderation and sanity is replaced by feverish hunt for sense-enjoyment. Eternal values are perverted to subserve temporal gains. Thus, when a whole society becomes votaries of materialism and enemies of spirituality, the time is ripe for the coming of a Krishna or a Christ, a Buddha or a Sankara to herald a new world-order, a new dispensation of harmony and high values of life.

It was true that at the time of Sree Ramakrishna's advent, the people of India did not set much store by their age-old religion and spirituality. Such an attitude, however, was not due to any forgetfulness caused by the flow of time. Rather, it was due to an open contempt for whatever belonged to the ancient culture of the land. In the eyes of the educated youth of India, the key to human prosperity and welfare was the industrial culture of the scientific West, not the spiritual culture of India. Consequently, they looked across the Suez Canal for the perfect life-model. In their eyes, Religion Eternal or Sanaatana Dharma was life-denying, other - worldly and impractical. It was irrational and unscientific, fit enough to be dismissed as a poetic dream or a bunch of superstitions. The only religion that was simple and true was Christianity which promised sure reward here and hereafter. If religion were to serve any useful purpose in India, they argued, Hinduism should be reformed on Christian lines. And religious reform movements of the time like the Brahmo Samaj attempted to do just that - 'Christianise' Hinduism!

In general, anything Indian was suspect in the eyes of the Indians themselves whereas anything English or European was an object of wonder and admiration. Evident was not so much an intellectual anarchy or social ferment as during the times of Buddha and Sankara, but a cultural vacuum, a poverty of the mind and heart. The people were behaving like a rootless race with no past to feel proud of and no future to look forward to. Several factors contributed to the sense of alienation from themselves. But the most powerful single factor was the system

of English education which reduced the tendencies of diffidence and apathy into a well-ordered system of mental slavery.

This was true of the educated youth of Bengal in particular as of the youth in the rest of the country in general. Therefore, the mission of the new advent was primarily to free the Indian mind from the hypnotic spell cast by the materialistic civilisation of the West and to help it to a rediscovery of India's religio-spiritual culture and its infinite riches. The process of enslaving India's mind started from Calcutta and with the introduction of the English system of education in 1836. It might be a pure coincidence that Sree Ramakrishna was born in an obscure village near Calcutta, and in 1836. What He did, however, was quietly to challenge the king in his own court and dethrone him from his seat of power. What was more, He was able to establish India's spiritual sovereignty over an empire larger than the British empire by making use of a select band of the English - educated youth of Calcutta.

There was nothing spectacular in the life of Sree Ramakrishna. In rustic simplicity, He was like Jesus Christ, like Chaitanya in divine intoxication and like Buddha in spiritual exaltation. As in science, so in religion, the two essential pre-requisites are a restless longing for truth and a determined quest for it. Sree Ramakrishna had both these qualities in abundance. Like the scientist in his laboratory, the saint of Dakshineswar began His religious experiments which spanned a period of twelve intense years. He began them at the very bottom, with idol worship, and proved that Goddess Kali was neither a myth nor just a stone-image but the living, breathing Mother of the Universe. She remained His life-long companion with whom He could converse freely as with any human being. Quietly He proved, experimenting with His own life, that the truth of religion was God-realisation. It was seeing, touching and feeling God with the clarity of the sense-perception. Scriptural knowledge or ritualistic worship was valid and useful only as an aid to one's experiential knowledge of God, His living presence felt every moment and in every pore of one's being.

Sree Ramakrishna did not stop His experiments with one success. He tested the truth of all forms of God and of all the paths leading to God, Indian as well as non-Indian. The crowning glory of his experiments was the attainment of Nirvikalpa samadhi, the state of being beyond all names and forms and the summit and summation of all religio-spiritual experiences. It was the same divinity that He experienced in all these

varied God-visions. Therefore, He could declare with authority that all religions 'from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism' were true and that consequently the existence of 'as many paths, so many faiths' was only its natural extension.

It was not just the truth of religion that He lived but the truth of the harmony of all religions. No doubt, He re-enacted in His life the whole of the Eternal Religion and, in the process, re-validated it in its entirety. He also fashioned a Universal religion, the religion of the future for all mankind. And this, He achieved, not by writing books or giving lectures on religion, but by the power of His spiritual realisation with its amazing heights and depths. For one thing, scholarly disputations were beyond Him. For another, they appeared unnecessary and out of place in His presence, for He was the living testimony for the existence of God. He was Himself God who lived among those who doubted or denied God's existence.

Sree Ramakrishna was always in a God-intoxicated mood, singing the names of God and dancing in divine ecstasy. God-consciousness was natural to Him, for He used to slip into trances quite often and effortlessly when His face would be lit up with a beatific smile. He talked about God and how to realise Him but precious little else. The language He used was rustic, enlivened by apt parables and innocent humour; the listeners would sit at His feet enchanted by an indefinable sweetness of love which flowed incessantly from Him. In the charming presence of the Great Master, their critical and sceptical faculties remained suspended, for they instinctively knew that He was divinity incarnate. And what was more, He could transmit a part of it to others at will, if need be, with a word, a touch or a mere wish.

Sree Ramakrishna's very presence was a pervasive influence on the lives of those who came into contact with Him. To watch Him or to listen to His words was like entering into a mart of joy and drinking deep at the fountain of wisdom. But His life and teachings were not to be confined to His devotees from Calcutta. He belonged to all and His Universal message was for the whole of mankind. An incarnation of God like Krishna, Christ or Buddha seldom comes single-handed to spread the gospel. Sree Ramakrishna too had His apostles-seventeen all-renouncing monks-with Swami Vivekananda as their leader. And Tulasi Charan Dutt or Swami Nirmalananda was one of them, a worthy instrument chosen by his Master to spread His message to the far corners of the land and beyond.



BIRTH OF A SPIRITUAL HERO

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Vero worship is found to be a human tendency far more pronounced than the much-maligned idol worship. The hero may be a king, a poet, a scientist or a sportsman. The Hindu mind has always looked upon a man of God, a monk as a hero, perhaps for the reason that in him can be seen the grandeur of God manifest in an ampler measure. There is also the related belief that a child born as the fruit of worship and prayer will grow up to become a spiritual hero. Such a person is looked upon as a gift of God and a blessing to humanity. World teachers like Sree Sankara and Swami Vivekananda belonged to this class of spiritual heroes. To the same class belonged Tulasi Maharaj, a gift of God and a blessing to humanity, as he grew up to become Swami Nirmalananda.

Tulasi was born in the Dutt family of the Kayastha community to which belonged also Swami Vivekananda, the foremost disciple of Sree Ramakrishna. He was the sixth and the youngest son of Debnath Dutt, also called Ganga Dutt, and Takamani Devi who came from Benares.

The belief was that it was the mother's piety more than the father's enterprise which brought prosperity to the family. Her devout worship of the sacred Tulasi (Basil) as well as her soulful prayers bore fruit in the form of a male child to whom was given the appropriate name, Tulasi Charan. He was born in the ancestral family house situated at 20. Bosepara Lane, Bagh Bazaar, Calcutta on Wednesday, the 23rd Decemher 1863, corresponding to Sukla-Paksha-Chaturdasi day and Rohini star in the month of Dhanu of the Indian Calendar.

The new born was the pet of the mother and the favourite of the whole family. As the child grew up, he captivated the hearts of all in the neighbourhood with his charming face, shining eyes and rich voice. He was as kind and generous as he was intelligent and resourceful. He was also strong-willed and stout-hearted. Even as a young boy, Tulasi showed unmistakable signs of the good-natured yet masterful personality of a spiritual hero that he was destined to become in later years. He was blessed with everything that he wanted or life could offer - except sound health. It was his ill-health more than his mother's excessive fondness for him that prevented him from going to school until after his eleventh vear.

Tulasi used to spend a few months every year with his mother in Benares. On one such occasion when he was ten years old, he lost his mother who was such a lot of comfort and strength to him. For once, he missed her gentle love and knew what it was to be lonely even in the midst of several relations. Shortly afterwards. Tulasi was admitted to the Bengali Tola High School in Benares where he distinguished himself by winning double promotions. Here his classmate and intimate friend was Hariprasanna Chatterji who was to become Swami Vijnananandaji, his Gurubhai and life-long companion.

It was during his school days that, under the watchful guardianship of his maternal uncle, Tulasi mastered Sanskrit in which he could converse as fluently as in Bengali, Hindi and English. It stood him in good stead in later years when, as the first Acharya of the Ramakrishna Mission, he was able to handle with masterly ease such philosophical texts as the Brahma-Sutras, the Upanishads, the Gita etc. to the young Brahmacharins at the Belur Math. In the South where he worked for three long decades, he found that Sanskrit was the only language in which he could converse with those of his devotees who could not speak English or Hindi. Unknown to himself, the years he spent in Benares were

moulding him for his future role as a religious teacher and guide.

In those days in Benares, there lived a number of holy men of whom Trailinga Swami, also called Ganesa Swami, was the greatest. He was variously described as a *Maharshi*, an *Avadhoota* and a *Paramahamsa*. During his pilgrimage to Benares, Sree Ramakrishna had met the Swami in whom He saw the living Siva. He was a remarkable person and his ways of life were strange. No one had ever seen him eating any food or sleeping at any time or heard him speak a word. He went about naked obviously because he was hardly conscious of his body. But at times, he could be seen in a playful mood when young boys would gather about him. Tulasi too had gone near him a few times in this way. Once he had even the good fortune to be fed by the saint with sweet *prasad*. Beyond the feeling that the *prasad* was very delicious, Tulasi did not look upon it then as any privilege or blessing to him. In later years, however, he used to refer to this incident half-humorously as an instance of 'stomach initiation'.

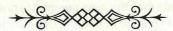
Tulasi lost his father in 1877, four years after the death of his mother. Completing his schooling in Benares, he returned to Calcutta and passed the Entrance examination of the Calcutta University with distinction, winning a gold medal and a certificate of merit for general proficiency. During this period, he began to grow into a young gymnast of robust health by doing systematic physical exercises. Self-effort gave him what medicine could not –a strong and healthy body which he found invaluable in his later life. His interest in physical culture was so great that he opened and managed seventeen free gymnasia in different parts of the city for the benefit of young boys.

As Hariprasanna was Tulasi's closest friend in Benares, so here in Calcutta, his best friends were Harinath and Gangadhar. They were also his neighbours and the three often used to meet in Tulasi's house. Like Hariprasanna, they too became his *Gurubhais* and life-long friends known by their monastic names – Swamis Tureeyananda and Akhandananda.





MARKED AND CHOSEN



One of the many places sanctified by Sree Ramakrishna with His occasional visits to His devotees was Bagh Bazaar where Tulasi's house was situated. It was during one such visit that Tulasi had the good fortune to meet Him for the first time. The meeting was for a brief minute or two; but that was enough for the Master to mark His own and bring about a transformation in His chosen. There was nothing unusual in Sree Ramakrishna's visits to His devotees or in Tulasi's curiosity in seeing a God-intoxicated paramahamsa. But it turned out to be a momentous meeting, an instance of God's inscrutable ways of His forging invisible links from cause to conclusion in the long chain of events in this vast universe.

Tulasi Maharaj had always looked upon his relationship with the Master as an intimate, personal experience and he seldom spoke about it. No doubt, it was the source of strength and inspiration for his noble life and work and he valued it all his life as a sacred treasure. His advice

to the devotees was to follow the teachings of the Great Master and not to waste their energy in trying to satisfy their idle curiosity. Yet, he could not altogether disappoint them who wanted to hear from him the circumstances of his meeting Sree Ramakrishna and becoming His disciple. Here then is that story in his own words:

"Nivedita lane and the tank on that side formerly belonged to us. The quadrangle in front of the house occupied by the Boses now (1928) was the place where we boys used to meet. There we were chatting one day when we heard that a paramahamsa had come to the house of the `new Kayasthas'. Balaram Bose had bought that property from the Banerjees and so the house was called thus. At once, all the boys ran. I also hurried to my place, put on a chhaddar and went to Balaram's house. I found that the hall, parlour and verandah was full. In the middle of the hall, a carpet was spread on a cushion with pillows on it. The paramahamsa was not there. I learnt that He had gone inside the house so that the ladies might have an opportunity to meet Him".

"I was but a lad of seventeen or eighteen summers and so I did not venture to get inside the hall. I stood outside leaning against the wall of the verandah. A little later, I saw a person clad in a towel of *gerua* colour coming towards me. His eyes seemed to observe nothing, for they were half-closed as in a state of reverie. Behind Him were a few persons whom I did not know. Suddenly, He came to where I was standing and looked at me. He did not exchange a single word with me. After that, He staggered into the hall. I stood non-plussed and forgot even to salute Him. At the moment, O God! I felt a creeping sensation within my bosom, a thrill from head to foot as if my body was becoming paralysed and I was inclined to weep. I ran home and laying myself on the bed, I said to myself, 'O! what kind of a *paramahamsa*! I shall not go that way again'. That was my first meeting with the Master".

"A few days after this incident, I went to Hari Maharaj who was my boyhood friend and whose house was close to mine. It was known to me that he used to go to the *paramahamsa* of Dakshineswar. But I did not know that the *paramahamsa* of Dakshineswar was this *paramahamsa*. It was an *Ekadasi* day and probably also a Sunday. He said to me, 'Let us go for a bath in the Ganges and from there we shall go to meet the *paramahamsa* at Dakshineswar'. I accompanied him to the Ganges, but after bathing I returned home and walked all the way to Dakshineswar. Turiyanandaji who went by boat with some others was already there, but

Sree Ramakrishna had gone out. So, we walked all around the place and saw the various things to be seen there. At nightfall, we went back to Sree Ramakrishna's room to offer our salutations before returning home. I noticed that among the many photographs in the room, there was also a photograph of Sree Ramakrishna. I pointed it out to Turiyanandaji and asked him as to whose photo it was. He replied that it was the photo of Sree Ramakrishna. Then I remarked that I had already seen Him. 'Where?' he asked, 'At Balaram Babu's house,' I replied. Then it is all right', he said''.

"Shortly after this, one day I walked to Dakshineswar alone once again. It was about mid-day when I reached the Kali temple. Without stopping anywhere, I went straight to the *paramahamsadeva's* room and found Him at His meal. I saluted Him and sat on the floor in front of His cot. This was my first bowing down before Him. I was so ignorant that it did not occur to me that I should not salute Him or sit by Him while He was eating. However, He did not mind this breach of ettiquette. He talked to me smiling all the time. At that time, there was no one else in the room. When His meal was over, a lady came from the verandah near the side of the *nahabat* and removed the plates. As I was a mere boy, she had no delicacy in entering the room and doing the work. Later on, I came to know that she was the Holy Mother".

"After finishing His meal, He washed His hands and mouth, sat on the cot with a placid face and began to smoke and chew betel leaf. After a few preliminary questions to me, He suddenly said something curious which astonished me: `The other day, a boy resembling you came here and asked me if I could act as his go-between'! I did not quite understand Him and I wondered why He used that slang expression. I remained silent, but He read my mind and said, `No, no, by the word go-between, I mean the one who brings about the meeting of a person with his beloved Lord. He is the guru; He is everything. There is no difference between Him and God'. I understood that it was a hint thrown to me to accept Him in that light. After a while, He rose from the cot and placing His left hand on my shoulder as a mark of favour, He said to me with great tenderness, 'Come here now and then'. At this, my heart was filled with great joy".

"He began to walk slowly towards Panchavati where I followed Him. Reaching Panchavati, He saluted the spot where He had practised sadhana and sat on a lower step. In an exalted mood, He began to

converse with the Divine Mother. I could catch the word `Mother, Mother' spoken by Him at intervals but could not, of course, hear the talk of the Mother. Also from many other words spoken by the Master, I knew that He was talking to the Mother. Towards nightfall, He returned to His room. Then , I prostrated before Him and returned home. He told me, `come again'." ¹.

The foregoing account of Tulasi Maharaj's meeting with his Master given by himself in February 1928 at the Sree Ramakrishna Seva Ashram, Benares to a group of devotees which included Swamis Heerananda and Viswarupananda, among others, shows how Sree Ramakrishna chose His disciples who belonged to the inner circle. They were shown beforehand by the Divine Mother and were accepted as His own only after getting Her permission. They were Siddha-Purushas, liberated souls who were His companions in previous incarnations. The Master Himself had come to recognise them, specifically those disciples like Swamis Brahmananda, Saradananda, Ramakrishnananda etc. The account also tallies with the statement once made by the Holy Mother that the Master used to choose His disciples with the same care with which a diamond merchant would choose precious stones.

Tulasi Maharaj's letter to Swami Madhavanandaji written in 1923 containing an account of his meeting Sree Ramakrishna gives us the additional information that "this incident [of his first meeting with the Master] took place an year or so before the meeting of Sri Girish Babu with Sri Ramakrishna".². The letter also says that he used to meet Sree Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar many times, alone or in the company of Swami Turiyanandaji, at Balaram Babu's house and at the Cossipore garden house where He was lying ill. On hearing the news of His mahasamadhi, he went to the garden house. "I bowed down to Him for the last time and placed my head on His feet. Then, from the cremation ground, I returned home at about 10.p.m.". 3.

Inspite of repeated requests to describe the circumstances of his getting initiation from the Master, Tulasi Maharaj remained silent on the point. However, he said just this much, "After a few visits, I was fortunate enough to be blessed with initiation or *upadesa* by Him". 4. When further pressed to speak of the form and nature of the *upadesa* and about what

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, pages 9-12

^{2.}Swami Nirmalananda, page 524

^{3.} Ibid, page 526.

^{4.} Ibid, page 14.

6. Ibid, page 12.

Sree Ramakrishna spoke to the Divine Mother, His reply was, "All those things are personal. Why should you want to know them? And what would you gain by knowing those things? How many, many things did He tell us! The human guru gives the mantra in the ear and the divine guru in the prana. Ah! the human guru [he repeated] imparts the mantra to the ear and the guru of the Universe to the heart".5. Still later, in his inaugural address as Chairman of the Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Mahotsava on the 20th of February 1931, Tulasi Maharaj recalls another aspect of his association with the Master in words at once eloquent and emotional:

"There were a thousand and one occasions when the Great Prophet Himself used to remain a mute spectator before a thirsting soul with occasional glimpses of smiles hovering between His penetrating eyes and quivering lips. For verily, it is not the vaikhari speech alone that speaks but the pasyanti speech that rises in the heart like waves and passes beyond the bounds of flesh and falls like breakers on the hearts of the audience like sweet caresses to lull them, to soothe them, to embrace them. I am one of those who have had the good fortune to experience this touch and I shall fail in my task if I do not carry that touch. May He infuse in me His Shakti."6.

It is certain that Tulasi Maharaj belonged to the inner circle of Sree Ramakrishna's disciples who embraced monasticism and led a life of hard penance at the Baranagore monastery. This can be seen from The Life of Sree Ramakrishna published from Mayavati in 1924 in the chapter entitled 'Hari, Gangadhar, Tulasi and Hariprasanna'. The revered Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj in his biography of the Great Master writes,... "Hari, Gangadhar and Tulasi would come at intervals and practised tapasya at home. All the above were bound together by their common love and devotion to their Master and were destined to reappear as so many facets of that supreme personality". 7. In reply to Swami Akhandanandaji's request for the monastic names of the gurubhais at Baranagore, Swami Shivanandaji gives a list of names in which Tulasi Maharaj's name, Nirmalananda is given. The letter published in Udbodhan is dated 8th January 1890. 8. Again, Swami Abhedanandaji in his Gospel of Sree Ramakrishna (1907) and in the

⁵ Swami Nirmalananda, Page 12.

^{7.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 15

A Swami Nirmalananda - Disciple of Sri Ramakrishana, pages 12,13

revised edition. Memoirs of Sree Ramakrishna (1939) writes about the Master's disciples belonging to the inner circle thus: "Among these were a few more devoted ones like Sarad, Hari, Gangadhar, Subodh and Tulasi who later joined the order and were known as Trigunatita, Turiyananda, Akhandananda, Subodhananda and Nirmalananda. Bhagavan Ramakrishna received them all with equal kindness and was ever ready to help them", 9,

From the above accounts as also from several other sources 10 it becomes clear that Tulasi Maharaj was one of the seventeen monastic disciples of Sree Ramakrishna, carefully chosen and trained by the Master to spread His message. For nearly five years from 1882 to 1886. he was privileged often to meet and serve Him and to receive His divine grace in an abundant measure. However, it required the energetic efforts of 'Noren', chosen by the Master as the leader and guardian of His young disciples, to infuse into him the spirit of renunciation and It was his gurubhai and leader, Swami Vivekananda who successfully persuaded him to give up his hearth and home and join the band of sanyasins dedicated to the cause of their Great Master.



^{9.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 15

^{10.} See Swami Nirmalananda - Disciple of Sree Ramakrishna, Chapter II, Pages 9-90. It contains some sixty sources which speak of Swami Nirmalananda as one of the monastic disciples of Sree Ramakrishna. Also pages 115-116 of the same book.



SANYASA AND SADHANA

he concluding portion of Tulasi Maharaj's letter to Swami Madhavanandaji contains a reference to how his life was given the proper direction after the passing away of Sree Ramakrishna. ".... I used to feel His want very deeply and used to pray to Him in my heart. He was compassionate enough to grant my prayer by presenting Himself before me in another form and fulfilling my hearts's desire. This `another form'was no other than Swami Vivekananda. He is the be-all and endall of my life. Whatever I received was by his grace. I look upon Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji as one. How I had the good fortune to find refuge in this perfect incarnation of love and grace! It was he who dragged me out of my home and graciously offered me shelter at the Baranagore Math. It is a long story and I shall relate it on another occasion if I get an opportunity....." 1.

That 'occasion' and 'opportunity', however, did not come about and so we have to look elsewhere to get a picture of Tulasi Maharaj's association with Swami Vivekananda after the passing away of the Master. For example, Swami Saradanandaji in his life of the Great Master says that while all the Gurubhais wanted to dedicate their lives for the Master, only Naren, their leader had any clear idea as to what they should do and how to go about doing it. Some like Sasi, Niranjan, and Latu stayed at Cossipore and went on with their worship of the sacred remains of the Master. The others continued their studies at home but visited the place off and on. But the task of bringing them together into a brotherhood of sanyasins by lighting the lamp of renunciation in their hearts was left to Naren, their beloved leader. For this purpose, he used to visit the young disciples in their houses and persuade them to give up the world and become the messengers of their Master.

Tulasi's house was the favourite resort of the gurubhais, for its inmates were courteous and generous in their hospitality. Besides, Tulasi was practically the master of the house. Naren used to visit it frequently and spend hours in religious discussions, singing hymns and in meditation. Nothing was more welcome to Tulasi than these visits of Naren and the other brother-disciples to his house, for they were the reenactment of the divine drama of Sri Ramakrishna with His devotees at Dakshineswar. Often after discussing several topics on religion and philosophy, Naren would begin to sing and the gurubhais would join him while Tulasi accompanied them on the pakwaj. Gradually, with the fervour rising higher and higher, they would begin to dance in joy oblivious of their surroundings. The place would then be transformed into a scene of divine ecstasy.

Similarly, Swami Saradanandaji in his Sri Sri Sarada Prasanga describes a dramatic incident which took place in Tulasi Maharaj's house. One day, after the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji was singing the following invocation to Gayatri in the very tone of the old Rishi he had heard in the vision, seated in the house of Tulasi Maharaj, 'Aayaahi Varade Devi.... namostu te'. He was so much absorbed that he sang the invocation from 10 A.M. to 4.P.M. that day In the Math also, he used to sing this invocation many a time losing all outward consciousness. But it was in Tulasi Maharaj's house that the most intense absorption came upon him".2. Numerous were such events and

experiences which instilled in Tulasi a deep sense of renunciation as well as a strong feeling of belonging to Naren and the gurubhais.

Tulasi also came to know that Naren and a few of the gurubhais had left home and become inmates of the Baranagore monastery a month or so earlier. It now required just a little persuasion from Naren for Tulasi to cut asunder all ties of home and relations and join the monastery as a regular inmate. With tears in their eyes, the members of his family pleaded with him to remain at home. But it was in vain and so they made frequent visits to the monastery and begged him to visit them in the house once in a way. But the fire of renunciation in him burnt so brightly that even the tearful pleas of his relations had no effect on him. It was the spirit of the Master and the loving influence of Naren, his brother and leader which prevailed against all obstacles and resistance.

The Baranagore monastery situated between Dakshineswar and Calcutta was chosen because the rent was cheap and it was near the sacred Ganges, "but especially because it was adjacent to the Baranagore burning ghat where the body of the Master had been consigned to the flames". 3. The place had the weird look of a jungle overgrown with weeds and brushwood relieved by a few mango trees and a solitary vilwa tree. The house was an old, dilapidated one, dark and dreary and well beyond repair. For long, it was untenanted save by lizards and snakes. Years of dust and dirt had reduced the living rooms to an intolerable condition of dampness and filth. The pond in the backyard, overgrown with moss and tall grass, was the breeding ground of mosquitoes. The atmosphere of the whole place was eerie and no wonder that the people believed it to be a haunted house. The inmates of this dreaded house, however, were glad to live in it because they could carry on their spiritual sadhana undisturbed by their friends and relations from Calcutta.

The life of intense austerity at the monastery was a far cry from the life of ease and luxury which the young disciples were used to. There were days of near-starvation during which boiled nimba leaves were their only food. Even during the coldest winter nights, they had nothing more than a loin-cloth and a dhoti apiece. They sat and slept on the bare, damp floor full of cracks. But they were hardly aware of these privations, for they were consumed by the fire of renunciation and a passionate longing for the realisation of the goal of life shown by their Master. Sweet memories of the Master and thoughts about their sacred duty to Him

³ Swami Nirmalananda, page 19.

sustained them through all those hardships. Food or no food, they would shut themselves up inside the house and spend hours in studies and prayers and meditation. Often, days and rights would slip by with the young aspirants immersed in meditation. Swami Vivekananda recaptures their life at the Baranagore monastery in these words:

"O! the days we passed! We were carried by a strong tide of religious practices and meditation. If there were demons haunting the house, even they would have run away at the sight of such austerities. Then, what to speak of men!".4

These young disciples of Sri Ramakrishna who had renounced all worldly ties and spent days together in hard penance were in spirit pure and true renunciants. Sree Ramakrishna had known them only in that way. Sister Devamata in her book, Sri Ramakrishna and His Disciples writes, "Sri Ramakrishna did not give formal sanyas to any of His disciples... He gave the first initiation to His boys, thus laying the foundation of their spiritual life, but He left the second to be given by 'Noren' who became the leader of the group after the Master was gone".5. We have it on the authority of such works as M's Gospel, Kali Tapaswi (The life of Swami Abhedanandaji in Bengali) and Swami-Sishya Samvada by Sarat Chandra Chakravarti, a disciple of Swami Vivekananda that it was Swami Vivekananda who gave formal Sanyasa to himself and to his brother-disciples. 6 However, there is no unanimity with regard to the date or dates, the mode and the order in which they received formal Sanyasa. But this much is clear that the Viraja-homa was performed after which Swami Vivekananda gave the ochre clothes and sanyasa names to all his brother-disciples on the 24th of December 1886 and on the day (s) following it.

Tulasi Maharaj himself recollects it as follows: "One day, Swamiji selected the *mantras* necessary for taking *sanyasa* from *Maha Nirvana Tantra* and gave *sanyasa* to all of us - all of us received *sanyasa* from Swami Vivekananda Swamiji gave us the *sanyasa* names.". ⁷, He gave to Tulasi Maharaj the name, NIRMALANANDA "on account of the rare purity of his character", to quote the words of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji. ⁸

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, page20

^{5.} Page 98, quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, page 21.

^{6.} Ibid, Page 21-22.

⁷ and 8 Swami Nirmalananda, Page 22.

The atmosphere of the monastery was vibrant with the spirit of asceticism and spiritual consciousness. It was a world of work and worship, of renunciation and service, of purity and spiritual beauty, a world entirely different from ours of earthly concerns to which the monks of the monastery attached little importance. They lived and moved and had their being in the wonderful spirit of Sri Ramakrishna. They were like the many rays of the sun, the many waves of the sea, proclaiming the glory of the sun and the sea. It was this singleness of vision and feeling which bound together the monks of the monastery into a unique brotherhood of equal love and equal importance. Their only aim in life was to labour hard for the glorification of the Master and His message through their lives of unrivalled purity and holiness.

From books like Swamiji Jeevaner Ghatanavali and Mahapurusha Anudhyana by Mahendranath Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda and from the accounts of those who knew Swami Nirmalanandaji of the Baranagore days rather closely, we get a clear picture of how tireless and cheerful he was as he sweated and laboured for long hours day after day. There was no work, however small and menial to the common eye, that he did not gladly do or could not with efficiency. He used to sweep and clean the whole place, collect firewood, draw water from the nearby tank, go shopping, cook food and feed his brother-disciples engaged in studying Vedanta or in meditation. Whenever he got leisure, he used to do Japa and dhyana or study Vedantic texts. Further, he would tend the sick and suffering brothers and cheer them up by serving them in all possible ways.

In Mahapurusha Anudhyana, Sri. Mahendranath Dutt describes Swami Nirmalanandaji in these words: "He was young, lean, strong in body, most sweet in speech and always cheerful. He was also an untiring worker. He was, as it were, the right hand of Swami Ramakrishnananda. In any work, Swami Nirmalananda was the first and the foremost. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji and Nirmalanandaji were the strenuous workers in the Alambazar Mutt also. Everything was under their supervision.... The picture of that wonderful period of Swami Nirmalanandaji's life is still before my eyes. In spite of all the continuous and hard work, there was not the least feeling of hardship or tiresomeness. He was always cheerful and smiling. In truth, Swami Nirmalananda gave his heart's blood for the work and progress of the Baranagore and Alambazar Mutts. ("I make my pranam, I make my pranam to him)".9.

Memoirs of Swami Sivanandaji, Page 123 - 126; Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, Pages 23 - 24 (condensed)

In 1911, Sri. Rajagopala Naidu, a devotee of Tulasi Maharaj from Bangalore, during his visit to the birthplace of Swami Vivekananda, chanced to meet Sri. Mahendranath Dutt. All through the meeting, Sri. Dutt was talking only about Tulasi Maharaj. To Sri. Naidu, he said, "you are fortunate in having the great Swami in your midst. He is a moon amidst stars. He is such a tyagi that he would give away even his koupina if others are in need".10. In 1942, when Swami Vishadananda approached Sri. Dutt for materials for the proposed book on the Life of Swami Nirmalanandaji, Sri. Dutt, expressing great joy hearing about the memorial temple as well as the book on his life, said, ".... He was a noble soul and I am indebted to him in many ways. The Baranagore and Alambazar Mutts were established by his sweat...nay, by the drops of his life-blood... He used to serve those institutions in unimaginable ways. He did not want anything for himself. He only wanted to serve others. Those old faces who have seen and known those facts, have passed away. I am also dying. Please express my respectful pranams as also my gratefulness in every line of the book". 11.

The foregoing accounts of Sri. Dutt, brother of Swami Vivekananda bring out the popular belief that 'Baranagore is synonymous with spiritual sadhana'. It also portrays in vivid colours the 'Cheerful and tireless' manner in which Tulasi Maharaj bore the brunt of the work. The reverence with which Sri. Dutt cherishes those impressions and memories opens a window on the Swamiji's wonderful, winsome personality. Even more heart-warming is the judgement of Swami Vivekananda himself on the life of the Swamiji as the ideal for all young *sanyasins* to emulate. "Look at Tulasi!" the, leader once said, "A *sadhu* should be like him. He has a very fine head and a very strong body. He works, indefatigably, days and nights; he can also immerse himself in meditation for long hours. He can sing well and play on musical instruments. He can expound *shastras*, hold conversations, give lectures and cook well! You should be all-round like him". 12

Surely, this is an instance of one depth measuring another, the deeper one's estimate of the ideal *sanyasin's* perfect personality which can hardly be equalled, much less excelled.

^{10.} Swami Nirmalananda , Page 27



AS A WANDERING MONK.

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e have already seen that the young monks of the Baranagore monastery had severed all connections with their friends and families. Their only attachment was to their guru and God. They never cared for any earthly possession but lived a life of purity, spiritual beauty and strength. The entire atmosphere of the monastery throbbed with the holiness of asceticism and God-consciousness. Theirs was a life of poverty and privation; but it was also one of joy and freedom born out of desirelessness and dispassion. Their pure souls were forged in the fire of renunciation and intense religious discipline. And yet, they found their monastic life inhibiting. For example, the young monks felt that they belonged to the monastery and bound to one another by love or what are called duties which in truth militated against the pure spirit of the monastic life. A true sanyasin has no duties as such, no belonging to or dependence on anyone except God. This is the measure of the boundless freedom which every sanyasin wants to enjoy sooner or later in his life.

The inmates of the Baranagore monastery too, with the exception of Swami Ramakrishnananda, had felt an intense longing for wandering in the wide world, out and away from the confining walls of the monastery. The holy Himalayas, the holy rivers and the holy shrines, indeed the entire Bharatavarsha, have always had a fascination for the religious mind of the common man in this land. No wonder then that the young monks could not remain insensitive to their thrills and calls for long. Nor could Swami Nirmalanandaji resist their magical appeal for longer than a couple of years. Finally in 1889, he took the firm decision to leave the monastery and go on a long pilgrimage to the many holy places and to wherever his free spirit led him from time to time.

The wanderings of a sanyasin can be compared to a voyage on strange seas. Those of the young monks are seen to have assumed a particular pattern. For instance, an inmate of the monastery quietly leaves the place and fails to return for months. He has no set plan of pilgrimage and so his whereabouts remain unknown. In the course of his wanderings, he happens to meet one of his brother-disciples by chance. They might choose to stay together for a few days or part company within hours without much ado. News about the monastery and the gurubhais is exchanged at these chance meetings. At the end of a fairly long pilgrimage, the monk returns to the monastery only to set out again after a short interval, sometimes in the company of a gurubhai but usually alone.

The itinerant monks are seen to have followed a few simple rules very strictly. Never to touch money has been their first vow; invariably, the journeys are on foot but when someone buys them tickets, they travel also by rail. They eat once a day... what they get by begging. They do not carry about them food in any form and so there have been days of starvation. Travelling all day, they take rest wherever the evening brings them... by a river bank, under a tree, a cave or a temple courtyard. However, they will not reject the hospitality offered by a householder, rich or poor. Life in the open in a village or a town or even in an isolated settlement of a hill - tribe in the Himalayas is equally welcome to them. A few pieces of clothes, a book or two and the kamandalu (water-pot) make up their entire belongings.

A wandering life for a sanyasin is found to be not only useful but essential for a variety of reasons. A sanyasin's life is one of solitude as much offreedom as in which, God is his only companion, his sole support

and refuge. Even the austere life inside a monastery cannot fully satisfy this condition. It is only when the monk goes out into the wide world and faces the innumerable problems and trials single-handed that his faith in God as the guardian of His child and devotee becomes strengthened. A wandering monk has necessarily to pass through several crises and bitter experiences. Disease and starvation, nature's hostility and man's scornful indifference... these are his familiar companions. But these again are the agents which help him strengthen his powers of endurance, his will-power.

A pilgrim's life affords him an opportunity also for his spiritual education. He comes to meet holy men belonging to different sects and following different methods and disciplines. Comparing notes with them enriches his own spiritual insights and experiences. Besides, the wandering life of a monk, free from the duties and obligations that go with the life in a monastery, enables him to remain absorbed in the stillness and silence of his own Self for as long a time as he desires which is the primary urge in every true sanyasin. And for one like Swami Nirmalanandaji, destined to spread the message of Sri Ramakrishna among the people of India, the wanderings must have given an added advantage. He must have come to know them and their different customs, beliefs and life - styles at close quarters. It is to be assumed that Swami Nirmalanandaji could earn all these benefits and blessings in the course of his wanderings in the Himalayas and in the many holy places in India.

It was not in the nature of the Swamiji to speak about the several incidents and experiences in his life during this or any other period. Yet, he had come to narrate an event or two as illustrations of how Sri Guru Maharaj had been protecting him at every turn and providing him with everything. Bits and pieces of his travel story can be gathered also from the *Memoirs* of his *gurubhais*. But to get something like a connected account of his wanderings, during the early years in particular, the only dependable source is Swami Abhedanandaji's *Amar Jeeban Kathaor My Life Story*. It is to be stated here in this context that a great deal of Tulasi Maharaj's travel and *tapasya* was done with Swami Abhedanandaji as his companion.

Before setting out on his long pilgrimage, Tulasi Maharaj took leave of his relations who were eager to meet him for a long time. Then, he accompanied the Holy Mother to Jayarambadi along with a few of his

brother-disciples. Tulasi Maharaj and Swami Abhedanandaji decided to go to Kasi and other holy places for which they received the Mother's permission and blessings. "So taking the dust of Sri Ma's feet and bidding good-bye to Narendranath and other brethren, Tulasi and myself started for Kasi along the Grand Trunk Road". 1. Walking all day, they reached Ghasipur, the place made holy by the saint, Pavahari Baba. They met the saint and spent a few hours in satsang with him. Before leaving for Kasi, Ayodhya and Lucknow, they met their friend, Hariprasanna Chatterji who was to become their gurubhai, known by the monastic name of Swami Vijnananandaji.

Swami Abhedanandaji describes an incident which took place on their journey to Haridwar. It convinced them that Sri Guru Maharaj was with them always, providing them with help through some agency at every critical turn. The Swamis had been walking till 2.p.m. that day and were feeling so foot-weary, tired and hungry that they decided to take rest in a village temple. Swami Abhedanandaji was consoling Tulasi Maharaj whose condition was becoming desparate, "Brother, why do you despair? It will happen as I told you. Sri. Sri. Thakur must have kept madhukari ready for us'..... Hardly had I finished when I saw a Marwari gentleman with puri, vegetables, sweets, laddu etc., in sufficient quantity in a basket which he placed in the middle of our blanket and left after prostrating. We were really astonished. I said to Tulasi once again,'...... are you not convinced, Tulasi, that the merciful Sri Sri Thakar is always with us?' Tulasi said in joy, Your prediction, brother, has come true at last. Really, Sri Sri Thakur is always with us"2.

From Haridwar, they went to Rishikesh where, on the banks of the Ganges, they spent long months in penance. It was here that they saw the blood - curdling scene of a sadhu pounced upon by a tiger from the near-by jungle on the other side of the river. Even when he was in the jaws of the tiger and dragged into the bushes, he was chanting 'Sivoham, Sivoham', thoroughly unconscious of what was happening to him! He was not identified with the body but with Brahman and so he did not know what the tiger was doing with his body. Swami Vivekananda had referred to this incident witnessed by his brother-disciples in one of his lectures in America to illustrate how a person liberated-in-life could be utterly unconscious even of his own body!

^{1.} My life Story, Page 152; Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda - Disciple of Ramakrishna, Page - 27

^{2.} Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda -Disciple of Ramakrishna Pages 28-29

From Rishikesh, the Swamis made their way to Uttara-Kasi, Devaprayag, Rudraprayag etc., before reaching Badrinath. Here in a cave, they did *tapasya* for weeks before trekking on to Kedarnath, Gangotri,Gomukhi, Jamunotri and back to Rishikesh. These journeys were made bare-footed, across snow-capped mountains and thick jungles infested by wild animals. But these held no terrors for them though their feet were badly bruised and swollen. A shady tree or a cave for a resting place, some fruits or juicy leaves they could get from the forests were all that they asked for. Sometimes, they had to go even without these. Yet, through all these trying situations, they continued their life of *tapasya* and kept their soul's spirit burning and aflame.

At Rishikesh, Swami Abhedanandaji fell ill. Neither medicine nor nursing brought any relief to him and so he was taken to the plains from where he proceeded to Benares by train. Swami Nirmalanandaji returned to Rishikesh to continue his *sadhana* alone. A very pleasant surprise awaited him there. He chanced to meet his leader, Swami Vivekananda and a few other *gurubhais* with whom he spent some ten days in great joy. But it did not last long, for Swami Vivekananda fell ill with a sudden attack of high fever. His pulse sank alarmingly low and he lay unconscious and perspiring on a bed of blankets. The brother-disciples, anxious and grief-stricken, could not bring any relief to their leader in spite of their best efforts. They began to despair of his life, for they could see no help coming from anywhere. All that they could do then was to pray for his life and await the inevitable to happen according to the will of God. Those were moments of intense agony for *the gurubhais*.

Then suddenly, they saw, standing at the entrance of their hut, a sadhu whom they took inside and led to the bedside of their gurubhai. The sadhu quickly prepared a paste-like medicine and forced it into the patient's mouth. He then left the hut as unceremoniously, mysteriously as he appeared in front of it. However, the paste administered by him turned out to be a magic medicine, for the Swamiji soon began to show signs of revival. After a while, the Swami opened his eyes and attempted to speak. One of the gurubhais (Swami Nirmalananda) put his ear near the Swami's mouth and heard him utter in a feeble, almost inaudible voice, these words, "Cheer up, my boys! I will not die".3. After his recovery, Swami Vivekananda told his brother-disciples that the vision

he had seen in that state of unconsciousness revealed to him that he would not give up his body till he fulfilled a great mission God had set before him.

The group of gurubhais soon broke up, but Swami Nirmalanandaji stayed on at Rishikesh scaling newer and greater spiritual heights. A few months later, he returned to the monastery in the company of Swamis Saradanandaji and Yoganandaji. It was during this time that the monastery was shifted to Alambazar where again he managed the affairs of the Mutt as the right hand man of Swami Ramakrishnanandaii. Soon the mood of freedom of a wandering monk came strongly upon him and he left the monastery for the second time along with Swami Abhedanandaji. They visited many holy places together but parted company. When Swami Nirmalanandaji was in Brindavan, he was joined by Swamis Akhandanandaji and Trigunateetanandaji. Soon he left the place to travel alone, but when he reached Jaipur, he was joined by the two gurubhais and Swami Abhedanandaji . Soon, all of them returned to the monastery to participate in the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna.

During his stay in the Mutt and in the process of nursing a patient suffering from tuberculosis of a virulent type, the Swamijii fell a victim to the disease himself and began to spit blood. Immediately he left the Mutt to save it from contagion and went to the Himalayas. Staying in the upper reaches of the mountain for a fairly long period of time, he returned to the Mutt healthier and stronger. It was during this stay in the Himalayas that the ruler of Chamba and the members of his family became the Swamiji's ardent devotees. His return to the Mutt towards the close of 1896 marked the end of an eight - year period of the Swamiji's wandering life which began from early 1889. These years were rich in varied experiences, at once fearsome and fascinating, useful and educative in spite of the untold vexations and hardship. For 'charging the spiritual battery' or strengthening the soul force, they were an unavoidable necessity. But the most rewarding, heartening outcome of the wanderings was the palpable proof of Sri Guru Maharaj's protective hand which the Swamiji got at every critical juncture in his life.

Once, he had to live on dry fruits for days together; at another time it was hard ragi roti for months. On both the occasions, the poor tribesmen or shepherds were his saviours who offered him their food. Often, he had to go without food. He had to spend a whole winter in a cave with the tribals for his companions. But they were warm-hearted

and generous to a fault, feeding the Swamiji with cooked meat for about one hundred days! Physical ailments caused by long treks as also by poor, scanty food were cured by themselves. Serious illness like the enlargement of the thorax glands and a carbuncle on the head also had troubled him. In such situations, unexpected help from some people, often total strangers, was sure to reach the Swamiji. Sri Guru Maharaj's hand had reached out even to the pathless Himalayan forests to shelter him from harm. The Swamiji himself had narrated the instance of how he was treated with the utmost friendliness and hospitality by a band of Himalayan monkeys who kept a night-long vigil to protect him from wild animals!

It is worth recording here that during these wanderings, the Swamiji had met his schoolmate and co-disciple, Hariprasanna Chatterji several times. During those meetings, the only topic of conversation was Sri Guru Maharaj. The Swami used to urge him to join the Mutt in the service of the Master. His insistent persuasion finally succeeded in his friend joining the Order under the monastic name of Swami Vijnananandaji. Let us hear the story as narrated by the Swami himself to a devotee in Bangalore during his visit to the ashrama:

"You do not know how much I am indebted to Tulasi Maharaj. We were classmates, and not only that, Tulasi Maharaj alone knew the details of my visits to Guru Maharaj. While I was in service as an Executive Engineer, he used to frequent my place and stay with me for long. He used to inspire me and press me to take up the cause of Sri Guru Maharaj. The thought was working within me. One day, Sri GuruMaharaj appeared before me and asked me to take up his banner. The next morning, I wired my resignation, handed over charge to my subordinate, ran away to Alambazar Mutt and became a sanyasin. That Is our relation".4



^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 35



ALAMBAZAR AND AFTER

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he Baranagore monastery had to be abandoned in 1892 and so the resident monks shifted to another place near Dakshineswar which came to be known as the Alambazar Mutt. Here also Swami Nirmalanandaji spared no pains in making the place as comfortable as possible for the inmates to continue their life of intense study and sadhana. Thus they were moulding themselves as the worthy messengers of the Master. But they did not know how and when to spread His message. However, they were sure that the hand of their Master would direct them in the right direction as hitherto, at every step and at the right time. For the time being, to plan a programme of action was beyond them. What they could do and strove sincerely to do was to perfect themselves as the fit instruments of their Master.

And then, the news reached them that 'the Hindu monk of India' who had become world famous overnight in Chicago as Swami Vivekananda was none other than their beloved leader and brother-disciple. They were overjoyed to know that he was occupying the centre of the world-stage at that time. They felt sure that the Master was working behind

the scenes for a new dispensation in which they too would have a significant role to play in the none too distant future. As in a flash, everything began to have a new meaning for them. Soon the realisation came to them that years of their study and sadhana in the monasteries, their itinerant life and begging food were only a prelude to a drama of world-wide and world-deep significance. It began to dawn on them that what they were strenuously gathering for years was, in fact, the wealth of India's spiritual wisdom which they were to scatter throughout the world. In short, they were able to see themselves in their monastic life in an altogether new light... as teachers of the Religion Universal. They were poised for a breakthrough far beyond their wildest imagination.

But it was not yet, for they had to wait for four years more to get the clear signal which took the form of Swami Vivekananda's return from the West in 1897 which electrified the country from end to end. When their leader joined them at the Mutt, they were drowned in a sea of frenzied joy, for he had already become the world-leader in religion and spirituality. The realisation came on them that what Sri Guru Maharaj had spoken about his superhuman powers had come true. Swami Nirmalananda who looked upon his elder brother - disciple as Sri Ramakrishna Himself considered that service to his gurubhai and ideal in life was his main duty thereafter. He was proud to describe himself as the 'Swamiji's butler'.

Tulasi Maharaj was not just the great Swamiji's butler, he was also the Swamiji's most intimate companion. They used to share jokes and even to smoke from the same hooka. When the Swamiji would begin to sing devotional songs, Tulasi Maharaj would accompany him on the pakwaj. It was to Tulasi Maharaj that the Swamiji confided his thoughts or loudly complained when the young brahmacharins of the Mutt acted wrongly or failed to make the grade. The Swamiji gave initiation to Swami Suddhananda and to Sarat Chandra Chakravarti only because Tulasi Maharaj wanted them to be blessed by the Swamiji. Swami Suddhananda describes the incident at some length in his Swamiji kathato show Tulasi Maharaj's large-heartedness and concludes it with these words, "Such was his freedom with the leader and such was his heart. After the initiation of the two disciples, Swamiji remarked to the Swami with evident delight, "Tulasi! two sacrifices have been offered today".1.

^{1.} Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, Page 39

Tulasi Maharaj showed devotion and reverence to the Swamiji as to Sri Guru Maharaj. Sri Swamiji Maharaj, on the other hand, gave to Tulasi Maharaj the love and freedom due to a *gurubhai*. Innumerable were the occasions when the two swamis were seen in great intimacy and brotherly love, a relationship so rare that eye-witnesses like Sarat Chandra Chakravarti, Naresh Chandra Ghosh, Jnana Maharaj and Swami Suddhananda – all disciples of Swami Vivekananda – have treasured those vivid scenes in their writings.

As long as Swami Vivekananda stayed in the Mutt, he was engaged in teaching and training his gurubhais to become the messengers of the Universal Religion lived by the Master. He discussed with them his plan "to create a new order of sanyasins in India, whose motto was to be 'selfrealisation in harmony with the welfare of the world' - 'atmano mokshartham jagad-hitaya cha"2. He exhorted them to feel in their hearts that true devotion to God was loving service to the God in the poor and the needy , the down-trodden, the lowly and even the wicked. Silently, he was moulding his new, revolutionary religion of manliness and love. For the gurubhais, the time they spent with their leader was a period of education and enlightenment, for they knew that they were to build the superstructure on the strong foundation laid by their leader. exponents of the new religion were to be not just brilliant scholars but men with a feeling heart "who would fling away their own mukti and would go to hell, if need be, in order to be of help and service to others".3 In his own unique way, Swami Vivekananda was re-shaping his gurubhais by giving a new direction and emphasis in using the immense powers they had accumulated over the years in the monasteries as well as during their wanderings in the country.

It was not easy for all the brother-disciples to understand the new concept of religion or the equally new monastic ideal. Tulasi Maharaj was one of those who readily accepted the change from the orthodox to the experimental. Spiritual perfection, no doubt, remained his supreme concern. But he was also eager to learn new lessons by participating in the discussions and conversations led by his illustrious leader. Sri Swamiji Maharaj, on his part, laboured patiently to awaken the vast powers lying dormant in Tulasi Maharaj and the result was that, next to his mentor, he became the most eloquent speaker and brilliant conversationalist. At the question - and - answer sessions, he was at

his luminous best, satisfying the earnest, silencing the mischievous and throwing light on the topic from every conceivable point of view. In an easy, lucid style matched by the force of logic, he would explain the most subtle and difficult concepts in philosophy to the wonder and delight of the listeners. This was the impression he left on those who had heard him even once. It seemed that the leader was moulding Tulasi Maharai to become a true replica of himself as an exponent of the new religion and an exemplar of the new order of monks.

In 1898, the monastery was shifted to Nilamber Mukherji's garden house. Here, Tulasi Maharaj witnessed a few breath-taking events initiated by Sri Swamiji Maharaj. The first of them was brahminising a few non-brahmins by giving them the sacred thread and the gayatrimantra. In the chapel of the monastery, the Swamiji performed the ceremony of making Miss. Margaret Noble a brahmacharini and giving her the befitting name, Sister Nivedita. It was here that the Swamiji's European disciples were graciously received by the Holy Mother at his request. Similarly, it was from this monastery that the plague-relief work got under way. The walls of the Mutt would have trembled to hear in utter disbelief the fervent words of the Swamiji that he was more than willing and happy to sell the newly bought property of the Belur Mutt so that he could bring relief to the plague-stricken thousands.

Tulasi Maharaj was not only a witness but an active participant in each of these significant events breaking down the barriers built by orthodoxy and creating in its stead a religion with human equality and love as its heart and soul. The leader's words and deeds had burnt their way into his heart. It was this lesson from Sri Swamiji's humanising, divinising religion that Tulasi Maharaj freely practised more than a decade later in the South, notably in Kerala.

When the Belur Math was established in 1899, Swamis Nirmalanandaji and Turiyanandaji were entrusted with the duty of teaching Sanskrit, Vedanta and Western philosophy to the young brahmacharins. When Swamis Saradanandaji and Turiyanandaji had to be sent to the different parts of the country for preaching, Swami Vivekananda asked Tulasi Maharaj to take charge of the Math. In the same year, Tulasi Maharaj toured Rajaputana supervising the famine relief work there. The first meeting of the Trustees of the Math was held in 1901 in the presence of Swami Vivekananda. At this meeting, Swami Nirmalanandaji was unanimously elected Assistant Secretary of the Math and Mission

which office he held with distinction for one year. For nearly six years, Tulasi Maharaj was throwing his heart and soul into the activities of the Alambazar and Belur Maths. He began to feel restless for re - charging his spiritual battery. Leaving a message to the Swamiji Maharaj who was to return from Mayavati soon, he went away to his favourite Himalayan retreats for doing *tapasya*.

Not finding Tulasi Maharaj returning even after long months, the Swamiji urged him to return to the Math and take up the work of preaching. He wrote, "there is no dearth of wandering sanyasins in India. But I do not wish you to be one of them"4. The tone of the letter was more conciliatory than commanding and its appeal was irresistible. Tulasi Maharaj was preparing to return to the Math when he got a telegram which he thought was another urgent summons from the Swamiji. But what it did convey was heart-rending news - the mahasamadhi of his beloved gurubhai and leader, his all-in-all in life. Unable to stand the shock of the grim tragedy, Tulasi Maharaj fell ill and remained in a semi - conscious state for two days and nights. One night, he had the vision of his beloved gurubhai at his bedside consoling him, "Tulasi! you think I have left you! No, my boy, cheer up. I am always with you".5 Those words of endearment spoken by the Swamiji in his sweet, silvery voice had the desired effect. Tulasi Maharaj began to recover quickly and he decided to return to the Mutt via Kashmir.

Sri Nilamber Mukherji to whose garden house the Alambazar Mutt was shifted was the Dewan of Kashmir at that time. It was to pay a visit to this elderly friend that he went to Kashmir. But as ill-luck would have it, he fell ill soon after he met Sri Mukherji. Inspite of the excellent treatment and nursing arranged by the Dewan, he failed to recover from the persistent pneumonic fever. It was found necessary that before the winter set in, he had to be taken out of Kashmir. In response to a message received from the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji, he returned to the Math. Soon after, Tulasi Maharaj was sent to America in compliance with the request from Swami Abhedanandaji to look after the growing work there. On the 15th of October 1903, Swami Nirmalanandaji set sail from Bombay.



AS A PREACHER IN AMERICA

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wami Nirmalanandaji reached NewYork on the 18th of November 1903. "For welcoming Swami Nirmalananda, Swami Abhedananda himself went to the Jetty. Seeing Nirmalananda after a long time, Swami Abhedananda was welled up with joy. The memories of practising asceticism together in the past... of wandering with Swami Nirmalananda, madhukari and tapasya for days together – all these were recollected. Swami Nirmalananda also could not restrain his tears of joy on meeting Swami Abhedananda". ¹ It took just two days for the Swamiji to shrug off the fatigue of a month-long voyage and be his own active self to take charge of the varied activities of the Mission centre in New York.

Ever since Swami Vivekananda appeared at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, America had begun to show a keen interest in the study and practice of Vedanta. It was Swami Abhedanandaji who, after the great Swamiji, strengthened and increased the activities in America in many ways. Besides invitations for lectures in Canada, there

^{1. &#}x27;My life Story', (Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda - Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Page 31)

was the constant demand for opening new centres. Obviously, Swami Abhedanandaji could not cope with the increasing volume of work singlehanded without letting the work at the New York centre suffer. It was under these circumstances that he requested the President Maharaj to send Swami Nirmalanandaji to assist him in his American work.

Welcoming Swami Nirmalanandaji and introducing him to the devotees of the centre, Swami Abhedanandaji said that 'henceforth his brother-disciple would direct the activities with systematic regularity'. Describing him as 'an ideal teacher and guide', he said that they were fortunate to have Swami Nirmalananda to train them in meditation'.2 The Swamiji lost no time in starting a daily meditation class, a Sanskrit class and another for Indian Philosophy. His all-round competence was seen again in his organising the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in 1904. The deep devotion he showed in the memorial service, the picturesque presentation of the lives of the two spiritual heroes and the sense of propriety in every arrangement showed his masterly style which fascinated the devotees and prompted Swami Abhedanandaji openly to praise 'the value of Swami Nirmalananda's work and the new impetus he had already given' 3 to the Vedanta Society in such a short time.

Reports of Swami Nirmalanandaji's work published in Prabuddha Bharata, Vols IX & X spoke of the effectiveness of his work in 1904. "For the first time since the Society's establishment, there was no break in the work throughout the summer, as Swami Nirmalananda remained constantly in charge and carried on the Yoga classes without interruption. This was a source of great help and satisfication to the students..."4. As days passed, a weekly class on the Upanishads, a discussion class on Indian Philosophy and a question-and-answer session also were added to the activities "resulting in a visible quickening of the community spirit among all the members, manifest in increased activities and enthusiasm on the part of everyone".5

In 1905, when Swami Abhedanandaji went on a lecture tour of Canada, Swami Nirmalanandaji had to manage the work single-handed. In deference to the wishes of the devotees, he began the Sunday

^{2.} Prabuddha Bharatha , Vol IX, Page 16 ; Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, Page 47

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 47 4. Prabuddha Bharatha, Vol X , Page 16

^{5.} Ibid, Page 16; Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, Page 47

lectures in which he distinguished himself as a forceful and fluent speaker. 'Vedic conception of God', 'Aspects of the Indian life', 'The Human soul', 'Spiritual knowledge' and 'The Master and His Children' were some of the themes he touched upon. One of the listeners wrote in the Prabuddha Bharata, "They listened to every word of his with intense interest, for the Swami Nirmalananda seemed to transport us to India - so clearly and earnestly he spoke".6 In course of time, a Vedanta centre was opened in Brooklyn and the Swamiji had to manage also that work which grew rapidly. But he was ready to help all earnest seekers by holding discussions, giving lectures and training them in practical yoga. His classes on samkhya and yoga were not merely popular but also appealing to the scientific mind. For example. Prof.Parker of New York expressed his admiration thus: "what a wonderful man was your Kapila, Swami! In fact, he was the father of science as well as of philosophy".7 Similarly, another scientist, Prof. Charles F. Gray who had attended the Swamiji's meditation classes took the trouble of tracing the Swamiji's address and writing to him for guidance in meditation a long thirty years after he left America!8

It is interesting also to note that the Swamiji's fruitful work excited the jealousy of the narrow-minded bigots. A letter which appeared in The Mail and Express' in 1904 read as follows: "Many would be surprised, though not frightened, to learn that Hindu Sanyasins are engaged in propagating their faith.... Many in this city [New York] are their followers and their number is increasing. One of these sanyasins [Swami Nirmalananda] teaches regular meditation every day. He invites all those who want to practise meditation. This is really the invasion of the heathens in the country of America".

In appearance, Swami Nirmalanandaji was of noble bearing, tall, strong and athletic. He had a pair of glittering eyes, a rich voice and a cheerful, friendly disposition. He seldom held himself aloof or looked solemn, mysterious or abnormal. He was accessible to all those who wanted his help. No wonder, therefore, that he captivated all and, in turn, was well-liked by all'. Yet, beneath the friendly, human love, there lay an indefinable grandeur, an awesome majesty which made him also

^{6.} Quoted from Swami Nirmalananda, Page 48.

^{7.} Ibid, Page 48

^{8.} Prabuddha Bharatha Vol - IX, Page 93

^{9.} Ibid, Vol X, Page 76.

an unapproachable ascetic. "I have met quite a few swamis in America", writes Sister Shivani, "but never had I the experience I had with Swami Nirmalananda. In his presence, I become speechless". 10

Swami Nirmalanandaji, the teacher of Vedanta found his American devotees intelligent, energetic and practical-minded which, he said, were the qualities very much useful for the realisation of the highest goal in human life. He was a keenly observant student of the American way of life, its noble as well as ignoble aspects. He greatly admired the American's self-reliance, dignity of labour, freedom from jealousy and the sense of false pride. In letters written to one Sri. Karan Singh of Chamba, the Swamiji had described America as the crest-jewel of nations and 'a model for every nation'.11 In one of them, he expresses his admiration thus: "America is a wonderful country in every respect in this age. It is hardly possible in the short space of a letter to describe the characteristics of such a great nation". 12 In later years, whenever he saw clumsiness or carelessness in work or the master-servant relationship among his devotees or their displeasure whenever an error or omission was pointed out to them, the Swamiji used to say how pleasantly different was the attitude of his American devotees.

It was quite obvious to the Swamiji that America was a land fertile for spiritual work and that plenty of it was yet to be done. What he did not know, however, was his own stay there. "I do not know", he writes in February 1905, "how long I shall have to stay here. It may be five or six years or more If I live to go out to India..."13 reflected the state of uncertainty in this regard. But within one year of writing those lines, the Swamiji left New York for India. The last public function he organised at the Vedanta Society was the birthday celebration of Swami Vivekananda on the 17th of January 1906. His numerous American devotees and admirers, and above all, Swami Abhedanandaji, his gurubhai were genuinely sad at the sudden departure of Swami Nirmalanandaji from "But urgent calls from his native land" as Swami their midst. Ramakrishnanandaji aptly put it, "made him come back for the regeneration of his own motherland". 14 On the 27th of January 1906, the Swamiji set sail for India.

^{10.} An Appostle of Monism, Page 234 11, 12 and 13. Translated from Sreemat Nirmalananda Swamigal in Malayalam (1963) by Thulaseetheerthan, Page 89. 14. Swami Nirmalananda, Page 49



BREATHER BEFORE BANGALORE

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was given a public reception and presented with an address of welcome. In his reply thanking the citizens for the honour shown to him, the Swamiji said that he had done nothing extraordinary other than following in the footsteps of his *gurubhais* in preaching in the new world the Universal religion lived by the Great Master. He felt sure that human beings everywhere loved God and wanted to reach Him in different ways which suited them. Pointing out that the different paths led to God, the Swamiji concluded, "To serve humanity is to serve God, for it is He who dwells within every soul, nay, every being in the universe". This was his first speech after his return from the West and it is significant that it contained his philosophy of action – work as worship – in spreading the new gospel throughout his missionary life.

After a few days' rest, the Swamiji was found busy with the activities of the Mission once again. Towards the end of 1906, he went to Assam and East Bengal with Swami Premanandaji for spreading the message of the Master. On his return, he visited Kashmir yielding to persistent requests of his friends and devotees in the state. It was while he was in Kashmir bringing about a new religious awakening there that he found the beckoning of the Himalayas irresistible. He went away to those familiar old places in the mountains to do *tapas* after a short visit to his friends and devotees in Chamba. It was proved that a long stay in America with a different life - style had hardly affected the ascetic in the Swamiji. In fact, it was found that he was more at home in the solitude of the Himalayas where he could remain absorbed in the Self with effortless ease.

But Swami Nirmalanandaji could not remain as a recluse for long. As predicted by a strange fortune-teller *sadhu* in Chamba, the Swamiji had soon to leave for the South to take charge of the Ashrama in Bangalore. Swami Ramakrishnanandaji had succeeded in starting a centre there and later getting it inaugurated as an ashrama by the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji, in Janauary 1909. The ashrama had no funds or permanent inmates; but the place had vast scope for a great deal of activities if only a senior Swami were to head the institution and direct its activities.

The President Maharaj in consultation with Swami Ramakrishnanandaji decided that Swami Nirmalanandaji was the fittest person.
Accordingly, Sri Maharaj asked Swami Nirmalanandaji to take charge of
the Bangalore Ashrama. The Swamiji returned to the Math to get the
blessings of the Holy Mother before he took up the new assignment. He
then proceeded to Madras where the President Maharaj was staying at
that time. From Madras, the Swamiji went to Bangalore with Swami
Ramakrishnanandaji to assume charge of the ashrama early in April
1909. It was the beginning of a significant chapter in the history of the
movement in the whole of South India, particularly in Kerala. It was from
Bangalore that he spread the message far and wide for the next quarter
of a century and more.





BANGALORE: THE RADIATING CENTRE

wami Nirmalanandaji lost no time in getting down to workholding classes and giving lectures in the different parts of the city besides getting up a regular Sunday class on Rajayoga in the ashrama itself. Nor was this his only work. Owing to financial and other constraints, he had to attend to the daily duties in the ashrama such as sweeping and cleaning the place and offering worship in the shrine. He bore this additional burden with the same cheerful enthusiasm with which he discharged similar duties in the Baranagore and Alambazar Mutts during his youthful years. When Swami Visuddhananda was sent to assist him, the Swamiji could accept invitations for lectures from outside. One such was to preside over the sixth convention of the Sadhu Sangha Mahasabha at Kurukkudurai which he accepted. He impressed the large and distinguished audience with his Presidential address which touched upon the theme of The General Aspects of Hinduism'.

This was followed by a few more lectures on such topics as 'Karma and Upasana', Who is a Sadhu?' The Human Soul' etc. In a very short time, the Swamiji was widely acclaimed as a powerful speaker, a brilliant conversationalist and a great teacher of religion and philosophy. It was with such masterly ease and authority that he dealt with any topic.

In the ashrama, the Swamiji held weekly classes and discourses. His conversations with the devotees were particularly educative and illuminating. He also arranged the birthday celebrations of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda on a grand scale with special worship, bhajans, processions, public meetings and, of course, feeding the poor with All important Hindu religious festivals and Jayantis were feasts. celebrated in a similar fashion. But the one unfailing feature of the celebrations was feeding the devotees, rich and poor, sumptuously. In the ashrama, the high and the low, the rich and the poor, the learned and the unlettered freely intermingled and interdined. They were urged by a sense of oneness and brotherhood, for they felt that they were the devotees and children of God.

It was the Swamiji's attitude to them marked by equal love and respect that brought them together in a bond of lasting friendship. His serene presence and his tangible love brought whole families to him as his life - long devotees. They could approach him not only as their spiritual guide and guru but also as their well-wisher and benefactor who was happy to solve their vexing household problems. For them, the ashrama was their second home where they celebrated such family ceremonies as birthdays, upanayanam, annaprasanam etc., offering special pooja and naivedyam in the ashrama shrine. Boundless was his love for them and every one felt that he or she was his favourite devotee and child.

The Swamiji's devotees did not belong to the same class of society. Nor did they go to him for the same reason. For example, the educated and the well-to-do among his devotees — judges, government officials, businessmen and the professionals like doctors, lawyers and engineers - went to attend his lectures and classes out of curiosity. They were more than satisfied with the life - giving message of neo-Vedanta as well as the freshness and vigour of the Swamiji's method and style of instruction. There were the others who were fascinated by the colourful pooja and procession as well as the soulful bhajans. But it was the third group of devotees, those who belonged to the lowest and the poorest

section of society for whom the Swamiji reserved his entire love and care.

These devotees were neither intellectual nor emotional nor did they care to know anything of the neo - Vedantic movement nor of the spiritual personality of the Swamiji. "Oh! what do I know about him? He loved me, he gave me everything for nothing in return.... He simply conquered us with his love. We became his children".¹ Fortunate were his children like Adimoolam and Madhuram Pillai who used to "shed tears at the very mention of the Swamiji's name".² And such was the purity and power of his love for his chosen children that he would freely forgive all their human weaknesses and failings – except hypocrisy, falsehood and "the householder's spirit of domination over the sanyasins and the ashrama matters"³.

When the Swamiji assumed charge of the ashrama in 1909, it was an ashrama only in name. The place wore a look of desolation and neglect reminiscent of the uninhabitable Baranagore monastery with its many privations and hardships. The lone brahmachari could not do much to improve its conditions. But the Swamiji belonged to an altogether different class – a missionary by divine right. The ashrama was a tumbled - down house situated in a plot of land overgrown with weeds, shrubs and tall grass. With his magic touch, he transformed it into a garden-house with all modern facilities. The lovely garden full of smiling fragrant flowers charmed even the professional Lalbagh gardeners. The place was not only aesthetically appealing but also spiritually inviting and useful. Visitors to the ashrama became devotees as they found the place ideal for spiritual retreats.

However, it was not done in a day, but achieved as a result of long and deligent work done in the spirit of worship to Sri GuruMaharaj. To the Swamiji, it was another form of *yoga* and *tapasya* which he recalls long afterwards for the benefit of his disciples in the course of a conversation held at the newly opened ashrama at Ponnampet in Coorg on the 9th of June 1927:

"When I first came to Bangalore, there was only that building – no funds, no cook, not even a servant to clean the utensils. Since Sashi Maharaj used to hold classes here and there, I too had to do so. I would return from my classes at 9.p.m. and then cook my food. Thus I lived,

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 55

^{2,3.} Ibid, Page 56

sometimes even starving. Then Mr. Narayana lyengar gave Rs. Thirty per month.... After much knocking about, I collected Rs. Six Thousand and deposited the amount in the bank as a permanent fund.... Thus, the ashrama slowly developed into its present condition. Is it all a joke?... If we are to show anything, it is that we are the children of Sri Guru Maharaj...... I have faith in Guru Maharaj. If I retain a spark of what I got from Guru Maharaj, people will come and bow down before it. Have faith in Guru Maharaj. An ounce of faith will work wonders....."4

When the Swamiji found that the ashrama was still too small for the increasing number of devotees, he bought twenty acres of land, put up new buildings and furnished them adequately with an eye on beauty and utility. In the extended ashrama compound, he had two wells dug – one for the ashrama and the other for the poor people who lived near it. It provided water for over five hundred people all the year round. One notable addition to the ashrama was a library stocked with some four thousand titles in English, Sanskrit, Bengali and the South Indian languages.

Thus, the ashrama became a modern centre of religion and spirituality for the whole state of Mysore. In fact, it was more. The Bangalore ashrama with Swami Nirmalanandaji as its President became also the centre for radiating the message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda to parts of the nearby Madras Presidency as well as to the whole of the far-away Kerala. We shall soon see that Kerala was to be the main field of his activity from 1911 to his *Mahasamadhi* in 1938.

During the Swamiji's residence in Bangalore from 1909 to 1935 as the President of the ashrama, he had to be away for long periods spreading the message in the other parts of the land. After each period of absence, he used to return to Bangalore, for it was to look after the affairs of the Bangalore Ashrama that the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji had chosen him. However, the Swamiji's personality was such that it could not be contained within the ashrama in Bangalore. In places like Ponnampet in Coorg and Salem in the Madras Presidency, he was able to open Ramakrishna ashramas in the twenties. Yet, his chief concern was the progress of the Bangalore ashrama and the spiritual welfare of its devotees. A few instances will show how keen and alert he was in fulfilling this twofold duty entrusted to him by Swami Brahmanandaji.

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Pages 317 - 318

Under the Swamiji's stewardship, the Bangalore ashrama had grown in dignity and usefulness. However, there was a technical difficulty relating to the legal status of the ashrama. The ashrama was gifted to Swami Brahmananda, but the land was registered in the name of the President, Ramakrishna Mission Institute, Bangalore. As long as the Swamiji continued as the President of the ashrama, he would work as an agent of Swami Brahmanandaji and the centre affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mutt and Mission. But there was no assurance that it would continue so under those succeeding him. So it was thought necessary that the legal staus of the ashrama be made clear. Accordingly, he decided to approach Swami Brahmanandaji who was at that time staying in the Seva ashrama, Benares. The President Maharaj, in accordance with the expert legal advice he received, executed a Power of Attorney in favour of the Swamiji on the 25th of October 1914. It reads as follows:

"...... I, Swami Brahmananda, Chela and disciple of Thakur Paramahamsa Ramakrishna of the sect of sanyasin, at present residing.....do hereby nominate, constitute and appoint Swami Nirmalananda, Chela and disciple of Thakur Paramahamsa Ramakrishna, at present in charge of the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Bangalore city, to be my true and lawful attorney for me and on my behalf... in South India".5

This document, meant for making the Bangalore ashrama a centre affiliated to the Ramakrishna Mutt and Mission and for spreading its message even in the eyes of law, itself became the cause of unnecessary legal proceedings, unseemly controversies and eventually the Swamiji leaving the Bangalore ashrama which he found as brick but left as marble. But the Swamiji continued his hard and dedicated work to make the Bangalore ashrama also a centre of unequalled holiness. An occasion presented itself in the form of the Holy Mother's visit to the South. The Mother arrived in Madras in March 1911 in the course of her pilgrimage to Rameswaram. The Mother had acceded to his request to bless Bangalore with her visit; but news reached him soon that she had her programme changed abruptly and that she was to return to Calcutta without visiting Bangalore. It meant, the Swamiji knew, keen disappointment to the hundreds of devotees too poor to travel to Madras or Calcutta to have her darshan.

^{5.} Swamı Nirmalananda, Page 95

The Swamiji, still undaunted and hopeful, left for Madras, stayed with the Mother for a few days and "prayed to her to bless Bangalore with the dust of her holy feet. She was gracious enough to grant the prayer"6. On Friday, the 24th of March 1911, the Holy Mother, accompanied by the Swamiji reached Bangalore. He escorted her all along the decorated route from the railway station to the ashrama lined with thousands of people. He followed her on foot carrying her box of pooja materials on his head. The majestic Swamiji appeared before his own devotees and admirers as the Mother's faithful servant, like a Hanuman or a Lakshmana before Sita Devi.

The Mother stayed at the ashrama for four days during which thousands had her divine darshan. On the Swamiji's request, the Mother graciously agreed to bless a few ardent devotees with initiation. Those memorable days were days of religious festival for the people who enjoyed the experience of a unique sweetness and love. When it was time for the Mother to leave the place, all felt deeply distressed. But it was the Swamiji who felt the pang of separation most keenly. He began to weep before his own disciples in inconsolable grief. The majestic Swamiji looked a mere child before his Divine Mother! A few days later, he joined the Mother in Madras and accompanied her to Calcutta.

If the Holy Mother could spend only four days in Bangalore, the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji was prevailed upon to stay in the ashrama for more than three months from the 12th of August to the 25th of November 1916. Sri Maharaj's visit to the South included also Kerala which had become spiritually awakened by now to receive the neo-Vedantic message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. To serve Sri Maharaj and to look after his comfort in all matters on his long tour of the South was a great privilege no less than a great responsibility. But the Swamiji addressed himself to the challenging task with his characteristic self-confidence and organisational skill. Sri Maharaj, on his part, was very much delighted to see the progress of the ashrama in all directions. He had nothing but warm praise for the wonderful work done by his beloved gurubhai.

The presence of the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna in Bangalore made the place spiritually vibrant. Hundreds of devotees felt their lives blessed with his *darshan* and by taking the dust of his holy feet. To the Swamiji, however, those months were a period of intense *sadhana*. He was in constant attendance on his elder *gurubhai*, serving him with unwavering zeal and devotion. His only concern during that period was to fulfil even the smallest wish of Sri Maharaj. It was evident that Swami Brahmanandaji had enjoyed his stay in Bangalore. The Swamiji seemed an altogether happy man, for he was able to make Bangalore a doubly blessed place, blessed both by the Holy Mother and Sri Maharaj. Late in November that year when the rains had cried off in Kerala, the Swamiji accompanied Sri Maharaj on the eagerly-awaited tour of Kerala with a sense at once of fulfilment and expectation.





FIRST VISIT TO KERALA

e have seen from the preceding chapter that under the able stewardship of Swami Nirmalanandaji, the Bangalore ashrama grew up into a religious centre of great usefulness within a short period of two or three years. Owing to the visits of the Holy Mother and Swami Brahmanandaji, it became also a place of pilgrimage of rare holiness. Besides, it assumed still greater importance as the centre radiating spirituality to the whole of South India. After the passing away of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, not Madras but Bangalore under Swami Nirmalanandaji became the unofficial Head Quarters of the Ramakrishna Mission in the South. It was to the Swamiji's inspiring leadership and guidance that the people looked forward to for the spread of the neo-Vedantic message of Sri Ramakrishna. In fact, the history of the Ramakrishna Movement at least in Kerala for over a quarter of a century from 1911 to 1938 was synonymous with the life and activities of the Swamiji during this eventful period.

In the wake of Swami Vivekanarida's triumph at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, a number of Vedanta Societies came to be started in many parts of Kerala. At the invitation of Babu Kalipada Ghosh, a householder disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Ramakrishnanandaji, one of the monastic disciples of Sri Guru Maharaj and President of the Ramakrishna Math, Madras, visited Trivandrum in 1904, and stayed there for some months. He used to give lectures, among other topics, on the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. What appealed to the listeners most was the disciple's pure devotion to his Master. Among those who heard his lectures were a few of the office-bearers of the Haripad Assocition. They desired the Swami to bless Haripad with his presence on the occasion of Sri Guru Maharaj's birthday celebration in February 1911.

When Sri. Padmanabhan Tampi, the President of the Association met Swami Ramakrishnanandaji in Madras to formally invite him to Haripad, Swami Nirmalanandaji was there at the Math for a short visit. The Swami introduced Sri. Tampi to Swami Nirmalanandaji whom he described as his *gurubhai* mentioned in *The Gospel* as Tulasi'. The Swami suggested that Tulasi would be a better choice for their purpose as he was an excellent speaker and conversationalist. When Sri Tampi approached Swami Nirmalanandaji with the request, he gladly accepted it. The Association received the news with great joy and it wanted to present the Swamiji with a Welcome Address. The Secretary wrote to Swami Ramakrishnanandaji for particulars regarding the life and activities of his *gurubhai* to be incorporated in the proposed Address. The Swami's brief but beautiful reply bears reproduction in full:

"My dear friend,

Many thanks for your kind letter.

Swami Nirmalanandaji is a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who took Sanyasa from Swami Vivekananda. Swami Vivekananda named him 'Nirmala' on account of his rare purity of character. He travelled far and wide all over India, spending most of his time in the Himalayas for a period of nearly twelve years. He made the Maharaja of Chamba one of his greatest admirers. Our President, Swami Brahmanandaji sent him over to America. Swami Nirmalananda worked so well in America that the people there did not like to leave him. But urgent calls from his native land made him come back to work for the regeneration of his own

motherland. He worked for some time in east Bengal and Assam. Then he was sent over to Bangalore whence you have invited him.

Yours affetionately, RAMAKRISHNANANDA" 1

The Swamiji arrived on the 15th of February 1911 at the railway terminus at Ernakulam where he was received by the office-bearers of the Haripad Association. The journey from there to Alleppey was by steam boat. At the landing at Alleppey, he was given a grand reception by the teachers and students of the Sanatana Dharma Vidyalaya as well as by a representative gathering of the prominent citizens of the town. He was then taken in a procession to the Vidyalaya where he gave a soulstirring speech on *Bhakti*. The Swamiji impressed the people so much that sincere students and seekers of Vedanta sat at his feet far into the night and again the next morning till it was time for him to leave for Haripad.

When the Swamiji reached Haripad by a countryboat, he was given a rousing reception by a large gathering of devotees assembled at the landing. Later in the day, he was presented with two Addresses of Welcome, one in English and the other in Sanskrit. In his reply to the addresses, the Swamiji said that "he viewed the addresses not as presented to his humble self but as indicating their spirit of bhakti towards Sri Guru Maharaj". Whenever he referred to his guru, his words were choked with devotion and once he even burst into tears which deeply moved the audience. They have never seen such rare and pure guru-bhakti at which they marvelled, particularly in a saintly person of such regal bearing.

The morning of the 17th of February, the day of Sri Guru Maharaj's birthday celebrations began with *bhajan* at the local temple. After a colourful procession, *Daridra-Narayanas* belonging to all castes, particularly the 'untouchables' and the 'unapproachables' 'numbering some 2,500 were sumptuously fed. At the public meeting held in the afternoon, the Swamiji spoke eloquently on 'The Inherent strength of Hinduism'. After the evening *bhajan* and *arati*, he held an illuminating question and answer session which showed how scholarly and brilliant he was also as a conversationalist.

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 61

^{2.} Swamı Nirmalananda, Page 62

The Swamiji was kept busy the next day too. Besides addressing the teachers and the students of the local High School, he held a *Gita* class and a meditation class for the members of the Association. Before returning to Bangalore at the end of his flying first visit to Haripad, he gave to the members of the Association valuable advice and direction regarding their programme of activities for the future. The Swamiji's visit lasted just three short days, but the impression he produced on the people was so profound and lasting that it changed the very course of their lives – from listlessness to devotion and dedication to God. To cite but a few examples of how the Swamiji's magnetic personality woke up the spiritual tendencies latent in the pure, simple souls of Haripad:

Charmed by the Swamiji's serene presence, his shining eyes and resonant voice, one from the audience leapt up and fell at the feet of the Swamiji saying, "Neelakanta-`bhakta' makes his *pranama*", all in one action. Before anyone knew what had happened, he rested his head on the Swamiji's feet and let it be there for a while. Gently raising the `bhakta' to his feet, the Swamiji said more in love than in jest, "He is a `bhakta' of Neelakanta. I am not worthy to accept his *pranama*". The Swamiji used to refer to him as `bhakta', the name by which he came to be known among the devotees. At the instance of the Swamiji, he was given initiation by Swami Brahmanandaji and *sanyasa* by Swami Shivanandaji. It was this `bhakta' who later became the famous Swami Purushottamanandaji of Vasishta Guha.

Another young man was so touched by the Swamiji's loving concern for him that he could not speak anything but only weep! The Swamiji called him, 'my weeping boy'. The first Ramakrishna ashrama in Kerala (Haripad) was built on the plot of land offered by him to the Swamiji. He was initiated by Swami Brahmanandaji and given sanyasa by the Swamiji himself. He was Swami Chitsukhananda who had the double distinction of becoming the first brahmacharin and sanyasin belonging to the Ramakrishna order from Kerala.

Advocate Subbaraya Iyer, the Secretary of the Association offered Rupees one thousand to the Swamiji as his donation to the Ramakrishna Mission. Sensing that an ashrama would come up in the spiritually fertile soil of Haripad, the Swamiji asked the donor to keep it as trust money, for "Haripad itself may have use for it". And so it turned out that

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 63

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 64

the one thousand rupees became the first donation for the Haripad ashrama, the first in Kerala and the only one which Swami Brahmananda had sanctified with his stay. The childless Subbaraya lyer's firm belief was that it was due to the Swamiji's grace that three sons were born to him at his advanced age. The glad and grateful parent gave his eldest son the name - RAMAKRISHNA!

The Swamiji returned to Bangalore after a short visit to Quilon where he gave a talk on the goal of life. In answer to a question from a member of the audience why he was not able to realise God in spite of his long and hard effort, the Swamiji said, "A candidate may fail six time in the Matriculation examination; in the seventh, he may come out successful. This is the case in religion also".5 All marvelled at the Swamiji's convincing reply, particularly for the reason that the questioner had passed the Matriculation examination only at his seventh attempt!

Those who escorted the Swamiji to the railway station wanted to take the dust of his holy feet before he got into the train. But before they could do so, the Swamiji himself fell at their feet, got into the compartment and quickly shut the door! The devotees stood rooted to the ground, stunned. Evidently, the Swamiji had seen God Himself in the devotees! Even with his first visit, short as it was, Swami Nirmalanandaji had made his mark in Kerala. It required only another visit or two for him to conquer the heart and soul of Kerala with the power of his spiritual personality. Swami Siddhinathananda has this to say about the effect of the Swamiji's first visit to Haripad,"Swami Ramakrishnananda deputed Swami Nirmalananda, a co-disciple of his, to go to Haripad. And he went and that was the beginning of a spiritual association which has been the main abiding influence for the spread of the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in Kerala. Many a life was transformed by this contact....".6

^{5.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 64

^{6.} Wealth and Wisdom of India, Chapter 11, Page 153 (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Mumbai - 7, First Edition, 1980)



KERALA RE-VISITED

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n a little over six months after he had left Kerala, the Swamiji had an occasion to visit the state again, this time in September 1911 at the invitation of Dr.Raman Tampi, the President of the Vedanta Society, Trivandrum. It was not as if he had lost all contacts with Haripad once he reached back Bangalore. In fact, the Swamiji used to help the Haripad Association through regular correspondence in giving directions to its programme of activities. But he somehow felt that Haripad was only the beginning; the growth and development of the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala had to be worked out from Trivandrum. He was destined in the coming years to conquer not only Haripad or Trivandrum but the whole of Kerala from Trivandrum with his spirituality. It was perhaps for this reason that the Swamiji found time to visit Trivandrum every year for a few days, sometimes even for weeks, till 1936 when he left Bangalore for good.

A few prominent members of the Society met the Swamiji at Quilon and took him to Trivandrum by boat. They were fortunate enough to be

in his holy company throughout the journey. Whenever they tried to offer him some personal service, he politely refused it saying that "he was strong enough even to serve others". He got a lamp lit and kept burning till the next morning, saying "dark thoughts come in the dark". The Swamiji fasted that night, only smoked the *hookah* a few times about which he jokingly said, "you eat food in the material plane while I do in the astral!" He was given a grand reception at the landing in Trivandrum from where he was taken in an even grander procession along decorated streets to the place arranged for his stay. At the public meeting held in the evening, he was presented with an Address of Welcome to which he replied with these introductory words, "There is an American saying, Love me, love my dog". It is your love for Sri Ramakrishna that makes you honour this dog of His".²

Dr. Krishna Pillai, a noted physician as well as a good scholar in Sanskrit was the Swamiji's host in Trivandrum. The doctor and his family were fortunate to serve the Swamiji in all ways during his fairly long stay in their house. The result was that the whole family was blessed to become the Swamiji's disciples and children who remained loyal and devoted to him throughout their lives. The Swamiji's programme chalked out by the Vedanta Society consisted of a daily Gita class, a conversation class on almost all days in the Native High School and a few lectures at the Jubilee Town Hall on specified dates. A few evenings were kept free for the Swamiji to accept invitations for lecture from other Societies, Associations and Clubs of a religious or non-religious nature. There was enough time also for informal talks and sat-sang with devotees.

Some of the topics for Swamiji's lectures were The Ideals of Hinduism', The Message of Sri Ramakrishna'etc. His lectures were never prepared before hand, not even thought about; yet, they were always impressive and illuminating. At one of the meetings, when the Chairman made a clumsy speech to the discomfiture of the entire audience, the Swamiji made use of the occasion to point out his own experience as a speaker. He remarked, "you look for fine phrases and come prepared with artificial rhetoric. It falls flat on the hearers, produces no effect. But if you have some vital ideas to give, proper words and phrases will come of themselves on the spur of the moment. Style

^{1.} The three 'quotes' from Swami Nirmalananda, Page 66

^{2.} Ibid, Page 67

will mould by itself as you proceed with your discourse. I had something tangible to give, by the grace of Sri Guru Maharaj, and so, I had no hesitation in speaking before Western audiences consisting often of the pick of the society in their own language and they listened with all attention".³

The local Cosmopolitan Club invited the Swamiji to address its members at the meeting specially convened for the purpose of hearing him. The President in his welcome speech said that the Swamiji must be a cosmopolitan as he was a Vedantin believing in Tat-Twam-Asi'. The Swamiji began his lecture saying that he fully agreed with the President's view that a Vedantin was also a cosmopolitan but very different from the usual ones whose cosmopolitanism was only in promiscuous eating and drinking. He also spoke against the modern fashion of social reform which was more pulling down the higher classes and condemning them than elevating the poor by giving them education and culture. In this context, he held up Swami Vivekananda as the ideal reformer who raised the down - trodden with love and care. He gave them food and shelter, clothing and medicine along with the self-confidence they had lost. His was the right approach to the upliftment of India. It was not known whether the Cosmopolitan club had benefitted from his lecture. But very soon, the Vedanta Society began to hold night class for the poor children of the city. Henceforth, social service as indicated by the Swamiji became an integral part of its activities.

In the Gita class, he chose to handle the twelfth chapter. With apt illustrations, he dealt with the difficult concept of *bhakti* in its *swarat* and *virat* forms. He described *bhakti* as 'the relationship of love' with the Lord and *upasana* as 'sitting near Him'. "Love makes one move nearer and nearer the beloved. For example, there is a beautiful rose flower which we like. We pluck it, smell it and place it near our heart – in the button hole of our coat. In the same way, a devotee enshrines the form of the Lord always in his heart". When one of his students requested him to instruct them how to meditate, the Swamiji gladly began a meditation class which became a regular feature till the end of his stay in Trivandrum. The student describes how the Swamiji conducted the meditation class beginning with the yogic posture in sitting, sending a

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 67

^{4.} Ibid Page 68.

current of good thoughts for the happiness of the whole world, saluting all the spiritual masters of the world, installing the effulgent form of the Chosen deity in the lotus of the heart and seeing His living presence with the steady unwinking eye of the mind. The Swamiji surprised the whole class on the opening day when he offered his prostration before his own students, saying, "you are all the living temples of God".5

The Swamiji was quick in detecting and exposing mere show such as a bath before sitting for meditation and smearing the forehead with ashes or sandal paste. "What is wanted is purity of heart and not mere external cleanliness",6 he said. He used to exhort the students to do sincere and steady practice of meditation so that they would be able to converse with the deity as with a companion. He also advised them that God is to be thought of at all times for getting concentration of the mind and deep meditation. "To make real progress in meditation, a part of the mind should always be given to God by a little practice you will reach a state of mind in which you cannot give up the thought of God even for a single moment".7 The student concludes his reflections on the Swamiji's classes in these words, "Thus we were initiated in practical spirituality and many count it as one of the greatest treasures laid open to us by the great love and mercy of Swamiji..."8

It was during the Swamiji's stay in Trivandrum that the news of Sister Nivedita's passing away came to him. He became silent for a moment and then solemnly prayed for the peace of the departed soul. When someone raised the question of her conversion to Hinduism, the Swamiji remarked, "She was never converted, only made a better Christian. The Ramakrishna Mission is not a proselytising body, but it helps all to realise their highest ideals".9

A group of the Swamiji's intimate devotees like Sarvasree Sivarama Pillai, Neelakanta Pillai, Sankara Pillai and Rama Warrier broached the subject of starting an ashrama in Trivandrum. Considering all the aspects of the question, the Swamiji agreed and immediately opened a subscription list with himself leading it by paying one rupee. He was followed by all those present there on the occasion, notably by Dr. Raman Tampi and Dr. Krishna Pillai who wrote handsome three and four digit

^{5.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 68

^{6, 7 &}amp; 8. Swami Nirmalananda, Page 69

^{9.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 70

sums against their names towards the ashrama fund. Those amounts turned out to be only the first instalment of their payment as the cost of the construction of the ashrama building shot up far above the original estimate!

Some devotees pleaded with the Swamiji to call on the Maharaja as was done by his gurubhais, Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramakrishnananda. He was quite indifferent to the suggestion, but agreed to it just to satisfy his enthusiastic devotees. One of them drafted the letter to the Maharaja in the usual style of 'the loyal subject' 'paying respects to your Highness' etc. When it was read out to him, he sternly disapproved of it, saying "You do not know what a Sanyasin should say. Though humble, he should not lower the ideal". He then began dictating the letter thus: "I am a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. As I have come to your Capital, I think I should convey my blessings to you in person..."10 The Maharaja was ill at that time and so he could not meet the Swamiji then. The Swamiji thereafter did not care to meet the Highness though he had visited Trivandrum on numerous occasions in the next twenty five years!

Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India where three seas meet has always held a fascination for the Swamiji. To him, it was not only a sacred spot blessed by the presence of the Divine Mother but also a centre of pilgrimage sanctified by the holy feet of his gurubhai Swami Vivekananda. It was here that his elder brother-disciple and leader had the vision of the motherland - of her glorious past, her even more glorious future and of the role he was destined to play for her regeneration. Whenever he visited Trivandrum, the Swamiji made it a point to visit also Kanyakumari for the purpose of worshipping the Mother, 'to re-charge my battery', as he put it. So was it this time and soon after worshipping the Mother, he returned to Trivandrum only to start for Tiruvalla, the third centre in Travancore to invite him. On his way to Tiruvalla, he stopped over at the Sivagiri Mutt, Varkala, founded by Sri Narayana Guru. There, he was presented with an Address of Welcome in Sanskrit by the disciples of the guru headed by the poet, Kumaran Asan. Proceeding from Varkala, the Swamiji reached Haripad where he took rest for a few hours

^{10.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 70.

The office-bearers of the Ramakrishna Sangham, Tiruvalla had already reached Haripad to meet the Swamiji. Escorting him in a tastefully decorated snake-boat, they took him in a grand procession to the town. At the request of the Sangham and the public of Tiruvalla, the Swamiji laid the foundation stone of the Ramakrishna Mandiram (ashrama) on the 28th of October 1911. In the evening, he presided over the anniversary of the Sangham at which he made an eloquent and inspiring speech on Sri Ramakrishna and the neo-Vedantic movement named after him. He also held a conversation session attended by a large number of the educated elite of the town. After a short stay at Tiruvalla as the guest of Sri. M.R. Narayana Pillai, the District Munciff of the place and one of his earliest devotees since his first visit to Haripad in February that year, the Swamiji returned to Bangalore. He felt inwardly happy that the foundation for the work in Kerala was well and truly laid within months of his setting foot on its soil which was to be the main arena of his missionary work.

Nor was the Swamiji alone in feeling a sense of self - fulfilment. The public of the three centres that invited him also felt overjoyed at the turn of events. In fact, their expectations were more than fulfilled. For one thing, they saw in the Swamiji not the meek and submissive monk of the old type, but a majestic modern Sanyasi of matchless purity and fearlessness. He was manliness incarnate, a perfect answer to the picture of the ideal man and ideal Sadhu painted by Swami Vivekananda. He was endowed with all the blessed qualities of head and heart. Learned in the ancient and modern lore, the Swamiji was an eloquent speaker and a brilliant conversationalist. He was a whole heaven above the educated urban elite who stood in awe of his amazing attainments and doubting his human nature. He was indeed a superman, yet he was full of human love and compassion. He was so utterly egoless that he had no hesitation whatever in falling prostrate before his own devotees. No wonder that the public of Trivandrum and elsewhere began to look upon him, even on such scanty acquaintance, as the true son of Sri Ramakrishna. His personality contained an elusive, indefinable charm... his nature had in it an element so sweetly compelling that the people could not but fix their gaze on him and listen to his words lovingly and long.



INVITED TO MALABAR

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he Vivekananda Association of Kaity near Ootacamund in the Nilgiris invited Swami Nirmalanandaji to preside over their third anniversary and deliver a series of lectures between 28th of April and 1st of May 1912. The Swamiji accepted it and he was on his way to Ooty. Strange are the ways of God! But what can be stranger than the casual meeting between the Swamiji and Advocate T. Kunhirama Menon of Parappanangadi? It was this innocent - looking incident which led to the Swamiji's visit to Malabar. Sri. Menon was a devotee of Sri. Ramakrishna and an enthusiast in distributing the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda literature among his friends in Badagara where he was practising at that time. But it did not occur to him at any time that he would be instrumental in introducing one of the foremost monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna to Malabar! He felt powerfully attracted towards the Swamiji by seeing him and hearing his voice just once, and that too from some distance at the Mettupalayam railway Station. When he learnt more about the Swamiji, he decided to meet him as soon as he reached Ooty. The

Swamiji also took a liking for Sri. Menon whom he invited to attend the meeting he was to preside over.

In the course of the conversation, the Swamiji said that he had not visited Malabar as he had no friends there. Immediately, Sri.Menon invited the Swamiji to Badagara in North Malabar and requested him to be his guest during his stay there. The Swamiji readily accepted it but promised to let Sri.Menon know later on about the details of his visit. It was this meeting that had brought about far - reaching effects on the religious outlook of a large number of people in Malabar as also on the Ramakrishna movement in Kerala in a general way.

Returning to Badagara, when Sri. Menon broke the good news of the Swamiji's visit to the town, his friends became wild with enthusiasm for making the event a memorable one. They decided that the religiousminded people from the nearby towns like Calicut, Quilandy, Tellicherry and Cannannore should also be invited to take an active part in the event throughout the Swamiji's stay in Badagara. Sri. Menon who had managed to get glimpses of the Swamiji's many - sided personality shared them with his friends and they were convinced that only a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna like Swami Nirmalanandaji could drive away the quacks and money changers from the temple of religion. Only a teacher of such catholicity of vision as the Swamiji could quench the soul's thirst of the sincere seekers of God by giving them the life - giving waters of the neo-Vedanda lived by Sri Ramakrishna and interpreted by Swami Vivekananda. Looked at from this point of view, the Swamiji's visit had an added significance. It was not just desirable but absolutely essential for the survival of real religion in the lives of the people.

Travelling by train the Swamiji reached Badagara on the appointed day *himself*, *alone*, as was his wont. At the railway station, he was given a grand reception with dozens of people garlanding him and taking the dust of his feet. He was then taken in a huge procession with the people chanting God's names and singing devotional songs. Crowds of people who stood with folded palms on either side of the road showered flowers on him as he passed by. Never before had the town given such a rousing reception to any visitor. So spontaneous and fervent was the devotion shown to the Swamiji that it would have gladdened the heart of a victorious general. It was a sight for the Gods to see! At the Theosophical Hall, the Swamiji was presented with an Address of Welcome to which he replied in a few but beautiful words. He said, "he

was glad that his visit had created a sensation " and added, "it was good because it meant a little genuine enthusiasm in Bhagavan's name."

But the important function was to take place the next day. It was a question-and-answer session attended by a large number of eager souls. The Swamiji also rose to the occasion excelling himself in giving answers to questions on a wide variety of subjects including the ones on Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Mission. The Swamiji's answers were clear and convincing and the whole session which lasted full four hours was a masterly performance. Pandit.P.Gopalan Nair was the first interpreter or translator and when he was tired, Sri. Kunhirama Menon took his place till the end of the session. The Swamiji remained fresh and bright throughout the long hours.

Some among the audience marvelled at the effortless ease with which the Swamiji dispelled the doubts of the earnest enquirers while he silenced the endlessly argumentative types with a ready retort or a clever counter-question. Some scholarly, discerning listeners were of the view that the Swamiji must be a great *Yogi* or *Rishi* in disguise to show such versatile powers. But for the audience in general, it was an elevating experience, a revelation of a new religious spirit. They went away delighted and blessed knowing that they could hear and see a true brother - disciple of the celebrated Swami Vivekananda.

The next morning the Swamiji went to Tellicherry at the invitation of one Sri. Kannan Nambiar, a leading lawyer of the town who had made arrangements for a conversation class. The Swamiji brought complete satisfaction to the entire audience with his illuminating answers to the several questions put to him. It was during this flying visit to Tellicherry that the Swamiji showed how compassionate he was towards the helpless and the forlorn. A young man belonging to a low caste and stricken with an infectious disease and for that reason deserted by his relations sought Swamiji's blessings. He knew that the disease was deadly; yet he hurried to the poor patient's bedside. He spent some time with the dying patient, running his hands over his body, consoling him and blessing him in his last moments. On his return to the town, he said feelingly, "Poor young man! He is dying. I have blessed him. He was insistent on my touching him. The disease is, indeed, very malignant. May God save his soul!" ²

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda , Page 77.

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda , Page 81.

The Swamiji left for Calicut the next day at the invitation of Dewan Bahadur Rajagopalan Tampan whose father had the distinction of having given the first *bhiksha* to Swami Vivekananda in Kerala when the great Swamiji Maharaj touched down at the Shoranur railway station. The long cherished desire of Sri. Thampan's aged mother was to meet a *gurubhai* of Swami Vivekananda and get his blessings before her death. He requested the Swamiji to visit his palace at Kollengode and fulfil his mother's wish before returning to Bangalore. The Swamiji graciously granted the prayer. A relation of Sri. Tampan who was staying with him at Calicut felt so powerfully drawn by the compelling personality of the Swamiji that he wanted to give up the world then and there and follow the Swamiji. He eventually did succeed in following the Swamiji but only after a few yeras. He became known as Swami Sreekantananda, the Swamiji's first *sanyasi* disciple from Malabar.

True to his prediction a few minutes earlier, Sri. Rarichan Moopan, a follower of Sri Narayana Guru and an aristocratic leader of the community, came to meet the Swamiji and requested him to visit their local temple. He appeared much pleased with the way in which the worship was conducted in the temple. He had spoken highly of it on several later occasions. The Swamiji then left Calicut for Kollengode where he stayed for a couple of days as Sri. Tampan's family guest. Blessing his old mother and bestowing peace on her in her last days, the Swamiji returned to Bangalore at the end of his first visit to Malabar which held a lot of promise for the growth and development of the movement in the area.





HARIPAD: THE FIRST ASHRAMA IN KERALA.

Caripad has the unique distinction of the first centre in Kerala to invite Swami Nirmalanandaji and to introduce him to Kerala. That was in February 1911. He visited the place again in October the same year on his way to Thiruvalla. But it was during his third visit on the 11th of September 1912 that the Swamiji laid the foundation stone for an ashrama here which was destined to be the first Ramakrishna ashrama in Kerala. It was already seen that "my weeping boy", Brahmachari Venkatasubrahmanyam or Swami Chitsukhananda had given a plot of land to the Mission and it was there that the ashrama building was to be raised. Similarly, Vakil Subbaraya lyer, the Vice-President of the Association had donated one thousand rupees to the Swamiji who asked the donor to keep it as trustmoney. It was with that money that the construction of the ashrama building had now begun. Sri. Padmanabhan Tampi, later Swami Parananda, was the President of the Association

whose efforts and influence brought in the money and materials required for the construction of the building. The devotees and admirers of the Swamiji worked so vigorously day and night that the ashrama building was completed on time.It was ready for the consecration ceremony on the auspicious day chosen for the purpose -4th May 1913.

The Swamiji accompanied by Swami Visuddhananda reached Haripad on the 27th of April to supervise the arrangements for the opening ceremony. His presence alone gave it a festive touch. Devotees from even the distant parts of Kerala had reached the place to participate in the function. The consecration ceremony began early in the morning with Vedic rituals like homam, the chanting of Sri Rudram, Chandi etc., besides Bhajan, pooja, procession and aarati. All felt that it was a blessed day and that the function was duly celebrated as an important religious festival. Everyone felt that it was in the fitness of things that the first Ramakrishna ashrama in Kerala was consecrated for worship by none other than His disciple and messenger, Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj.

It was significant and memorable also for another reason. The Swamiji's firm resolve was that the long -standing, deep-rooted social tyranny of untouchability would not be allowed to enter the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. Accordingly, he got the Hindus of all castes and classes enter the ashrama and worship Sri Ramakrishna on that day. Habits die hard and the firmly entrenched caste prejudice was not willing to withdraw without a fight. Its protagonists went even to the extent of a direct confrontation with the Swamiji threatening him with social boycott and withdrawal of support to the ashrama. But they soon came to realise that the Swamiji was made of sterner stuff. Out came his reply, quick as a flash of lightening and loud as a thunder-clap : " Every one of you may desert me . But I cannot lower my ideal . If you make me starve, I know that Sri Guru Maharaj will come and feed me." 1 Protests died down and all accepted the Swamiji's stand with bowed heads.

But it was only for the time being, only during the Swamiji's stay in the ashrama. Once his back was turned, the lunatics returned with renewed vigour. They withdrew their support and successfully persuaded their neighbours from visiting the ashrama. Even the barbers and the washermen were made to stay away. They stopped the supply of vegetables, milk, provisions and other essential articles to the

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 82

ashrama. The leaders of the social boycott openly encouraged the unruly elements among their ranks to stone the inmates of the ashrama who, however, beat off all onslaughts on them with superhuman powers of endurance and determination.

The forces of orthodoxy and caste prejudice withdrew for the moment but only to strike again at an opportune moment which was not long in coming. It presented itself during the next celebrations blessed by the Swamiji with his serene, majestic presence. This time he was on his own ground and was more determined than ever before to pull down the walls of narrowness and superstition built to divide man against man. His plan was to publicly demonstrate the ideal that God's devotees belonged to one class and one caste. Accordingly it was decided that while taking Bhagavan's prasad, devotees belonging to the highest and the lowest castes would sit together, that is to say, interdine!

The very thought of interdining was outrageous, an anathema to those who lived in Kerala more than eight decades ago! But it was precisely that abhorrent idea that the Swamiji quietly put into practice for the first time in Kerala and in the first Ramakrishna Ashrama in the state. Caste orthodoxy was up in arms in open rebellion against the Swamiji's experiment with equality among the children of God. The episode began on a quiet note, took a sudden dramatic turn and ended up with an intensity which was truly electrifying. The whole incident with its benificent impact on inter-personal relationship in society is best described in the words of Swami Siddhinathananda: "After the first batch had finished, the leaves were to be removed; but the servants engaged for it refused to work because all kinds of low-caste people had eaten there. There was a sense of suspense. The observant eyes of Swami Nirmalananda grasped the situation and he acted rising equal to it. He said: "They are all devotees of Bhagavan. I am their servant. I have no caste. But you should maintain yours". So saying, he started removing the leaves. No sooner had he removed a leaf or two than there was a rush by one and all to do the work. With this one stroke, he broke the backbone of the age-old demon of caste. That was the first mortal blow on the citadel of caste......the first blow was struck by Swami Nirmalananda, a child of Ramakrishna and a co-disciple of Swami Vivekananda."2

^{2.} Wealth and Wisdom of India, Chapter XI, Pages - 153 - 154

Those who were eye-witnesses to the scene of the Swamiji's incredible courage of conviction had recalled the thrilling incident on several occasions later on to point out that what the Swamiji had done was nothing short of bearding the lion in its own den or challenging the king in his own court. For, Haripad in those days was "one of the citadels of Brahmin orthodoxy. The Swami stormed it without firing a shot. "3 It is to be clearly stated here that the Swamiji's crusade against the tyranny of caste had nothing of the self-glorifying zeal shown by the latterday socio-political reformers. It was one of the essential and natural byproducts of the Vedantic same-sightedness and love for all. As its able exponent - exemplar, he simply looked upon all with an equal eye without feeling any ill-will against anyone belonging to the higher castes. Nor did he excuse the weakness of the lower classes and castes much less their sense of injured innocence and least of all their empty claim to respectability. His purpose was also to instil self-confidence even in the lowliest and the lost and to create in them the inner urge to become selfrespecting human beings. The following instance will prove the point:

A carpenter once asked the Swamiji why they, the descendants of Viswakarma, were not shown the respect due to them. The Swamiji replied that a similar question was asked by some monkeys who traced their origin from Hanuman, the servant of Sri Rama and worshipped by men. The answer given to them was that they should be like Hanuman themselves and then they too would be worshipped by men. The Swamiji then advised the carpenter in a serious tone, "Mere vaunting of the greatness of your ancestors will not make you great. Acquire that quality which made Viswakarma great. Then you will rise in the estimation of all." ⁴

Now, to continue the story of the celebration after the dramatic interdining episode. The Swamiji held an hour-long conversation class at which a large number of sincere devotees sat at his feet and get the benefit of satsang with him. Later in the afternoon at the largely attended public meeting, the Swamiji persuaded many devotees who had gathered there from several centres of Kerala from Trivandrum to Tellicherry to speak on different topics. The purpose was to make use of the ocassion for shaping a brotherhood of devotees among them, rather

than to bring out their talents in speech-making.

Spending just a few days more at Haripad, the Swamiji left the place for Tiruvalla where the Ramakrishna Ashrama was awaiting consecration at the hands of the Swamiji. After the installation ceremony was gone through in accordance with the Vedic rituals, the Swamiji performed the first pooja in the shrine on the 9th of May 1913. In answer to a question as to how the daily pooja was to be conducted, he said:

"There is no need for any formalism or ritualism. Conduct yourself as you would in the presence of Bhagavan. Feel His presence and serve Him as you would serve a person in the usual way." 5 To another question on maanasa-pooja, he said, Say with all your heart, 'O Lord! all the flowers that bloom in the world... 'all the fruits in the whole creation... and the daintiest dishes anywhere on earth are Thine and for Thee, Pray accept them. 'That is maanasa - pooja. Along with it, you should do some maanusha - pooja as well. How many are ill-fed and ill-clad! Feed them, clothe them to the best of your means. Without this maanusha-pooja, mere maanasa - pooja is of no effect." 6

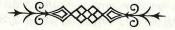
Before returning to Bangalore, the Swamiji paid his second visit to Malabar - Calicut, Tellicherry etc. - from where many new devotees found their refuge in him. Notable among them was the young widowed mother, Smy. Palat Parukutty Amma who was staying with her mother at Calicut during those anguished days. The memorable incident of her meeting the Swamiji and seeking his blessings is recorded in her diary.7 The diary as well as the two letters reveal that the Swamiji's influence on her and her family was so pervasive that it was his grace and blessing which guided them all through their lives. This is repeatedly and emphatically endorsed in the writings and statements of every member of the family.

^{5, 6.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 84.

^{7.} See Page 85, Sri K.P.Achutha Menon's letter, Page 138, Para 2 and Smy Srikumari Amma's letter, pages 134 & 135 of Swami Nirmalananda - Disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, by Brahma Gopal Dutt.



OTTAPALAM SANCTIFIED



rom 1911 to 1913, the Swamiji had passed by Ottapalam at least four times on his journeys by train in the course of his visits to Travancore. In this small town in South Malabar, a Vedanta Society with Sri V.K. Narayanan Nair, Vakil, as its President, had begun functioning a few years earlier. Besides reading religious journals and discussing Vedanta, its important annual function was celebrating the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna Deva. It was not as if the Society had not heard of the Swamiji and his good work in Travancore as well as of his visit to North Malabar. Nor were its members indifferent to meeting and hearing him or inviting him to Ottapalam much earlier. However, it was only in 1914 that Ottapalam had the good fortune to be blessed by the Swamiji with his holy presence for the first time. Every year from then ownwards until the opening of the Ramakrishna Niranjan Ashrama in the nearby village in 1926, the Swamiji visited Ottapalam to stay as "V.K's" guest for a few days before leaving for Travancore.

It was at the instance of Sri. Kunhirama Menon who was the first to invite the Swamiji to Malabar that Sri. V.K.Narayanan Nair as the Presient of the Vedanta Society invited the Swamiji to Ottapalam and requested him to stay there for a few days as his guest. Sri. Nair also suggested to Swamiji that Ottapalam would be a convenient half-way house where he could break his long and tedious journey and continue it again by rail and boat after a few days' welcome rest. The Swamiji agreed to the suggestion and graciously accepted the invitation. Soon after the birthday celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna in March 1914, the Swamiji started from Bangalore on his annual Kerala tour. On his way to Haripad this time, the Swamiji was kind to alight at Ottapalam and bless the place with the dust of his holy feet.

From the very beginning, he seemed to have taken a special liking for the place for a variety of reasons. For one thing, it was a quiet place, free from the din and bustle of crowded cities and blessed by nature's bountiful beauty — the smooth - flowing Bharata river nearby, the rolling green fields, and hills crowned with forest trees! All these perhaps reminded the Swamiji of the charming village retreats in the foothills of the Himalayas where he had spent long periods in hard tapasya during his early days as a wandering monk. For another, he liked his friend and host, "V.K." and the members of his family whose only concern in life at that time was to serve the Swamiji with all their heart and soul. He would have also noticed that most of the devotees who had gone to meet him were pure and simple souls, earnest seekers of God who became deeply attached to him .

No doubt there were a few imposters and cranks who approached him for his approval and encouragement to their abnormal and mystifying sadhana. The Swamiji had no hesitation whatever in telling such people that there was no short-cut to God and that the only way to reach Him was by constantly striving to reach Him with a pure, yearning heart. For the large number of sincere devotees and seekers of God, the hours spent at the Swamiji's holy feet were hours of rich experience and pure joy. They were basking in the sunshine of his love and grace, at once human and divine . V.K 's house during Swamiji's stay had become a mart of joy, a place enveloped in white mantle of holiness. It had become the meeting ground of good souls come together for sat- sang with a god-like guru. The Swamiji used to hold his classes and talks in the spacious hall of the Kamalalaya Press where the Vedanta Society also

used to have its meetings. The birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna came to be celebrated during his stay at Ottapalam. In short, the Swamiji's visit to the town was like a religious festival to the devotees whose hearts were lit up with joy as long as he stayed in their midst . But when it was time for him to leave the place, they felt as if the light of joy that was burning so brightly within them till then had suddenly gone out of their lives!

It was during his first visit to Ottapalam that the Swamiji agreed to accept the gift of the Yoga Mutt of Quilandy and run it as a Ramakrishna ashrama. Lord Skanda was the deity worshipped in the Mutt which also offered shelter to wandering monks. It was managed by Sri. K.P. Krishnan Nair, a friend of Sri. Kunhirama Menon. He had met the Swamiji at Badagara and was profoundly impressed with him as also with the aims and objects of the Ramakrishna Mission as explained by the Swamiji . Since then, the thought was getting stronger and firmer in him that the Mutt would serve its purpose best if the Swamiji could accept it as a gift from the public and run it as a Ramakrishna ashrama. On the Swamiji's acceptance of Sri.Krishnan Nair's proposal, a gift deed was drawn up and registered in the name of the President of the Ramakrishna Mission in April 1914. The Swamiji then sent Bhakta Neelakanta to Quilandy to look after the affairs of the new centre there .

The Swamiji left Ottapalam on the 5th of April 1914 for Haripad where the birthday celebration of Sri Ramakrishna was to be held on a grand scale on the 10th of April. The day after the celebration, he admitted an untouchable panchama boy in the ashrama as a brahmacharin. He stayed there for a few days more training the brahmacharins and holding meditation classes. It was an unusually busy schedule of travel and visit that awaited the Swamiji this time. He left Haripad to pay a flying visit to Trivandrum and Kanyakumari. Soon after his return from those places, he went to Kandiyoor and Muttom where a large number of people had gathered to see him and listen to his words of wisdom. At the conversation class held at Kandiyoor, the Swamiji spoke at great length on Sri Ramakrishna as the divine incarnation of the age. His words which painted the living form of Sri Ramakrishna winged their way into the hearts of the listeners and kept them spell-bound. They were enthralled by the magic of his words vibrant with devotion to his Master. It was an altogether novel and unforgettable experience for the gathering of devotees many of whom became his disciples in later years. As a result

of their long and sincere efforts, an ashrama came to be opened in Muttom in course of time.

It was to Mavelikara and Mannar that the Swamiji went next. In both these places, he held conversation classes touching on a wide range of subjects including the life and teachings of his Master and their influence on the contemporaries as well as on the world of modern thought. The place of his next visit was Tiruvalla where he was to preside over the birthday celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The ashrama at Tiruvalla was opened the previous year and the Swamiji wanted to stay there for a longer period teaching and training its inmates. But a great deal of work including a trip to the North was awaiting him. So, he cut short his stay both at Tiruvalla and Haripad and returned to Bangalore. On the way, however, he made short stop-overs at Alleppey and Shertalai where a large number of devotees had gathered to have his darshan.

The Swamiji was very particular that those who had followed him should be true devotees of God in every respect, particularly his disciples and the inmates of the ashramas. He found enough time to train these 'sappers and miners' in the army of Sri Ramakrishna and to cast them into the perfect mould of the servants of 'the God in man'. In this, he did not pardon or overlook even the minormost errors, for nothing was too trivial in character - building and correct behaviour. He was certainly a strict disciplinarian, often giving others the impression that he was also a harsh task-master. Very few could see the melting love beneath his rough exterior which belied his soulful love and care for his own. The mask of cruel punishment was for making his disciples perfect and, like the parent's or the teacher's, it was thin and worn because of his loving concern for the youngsters. A few instances will bring out this aspect of his method of training.

One day, during his stay in Haripad, the Swamiji was holding a meditation class in the hall near the shrine room. The brahmacharin, after offering naivedvam in the shrine room, shut the door with a mild bang. After the meditation class the Swamiji took the offender severely to task for his carelessness: "You think meditation is a child's play and a show! Would Bhagavan have got angry with you if you had not shut the door and made that disturbing noise ? Could you not have offered naivedyam and sat down in a corner to meditate ?"1, he chided the brahmacharin in the hearing of all. The next incident had taken place in

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 91

the Tiruvalla ashrama on the occasion of Sri Ramakrishna's birthday celebration.

At the public meeting, the *brahmacharin* in his annual report had overpraised a rich officer who had made generous contributions to the ashrama. After the meeting, the Swamiji roundly condemned the *brahmacharin's* attitude in words blazing with indignation: "You are not a true devotee, nor do you know the spirit of the Mission. Each one serves the cause according to his means and capacity. In the morning I saw one of the cooks standing in front of the blazing fire stirring the *payasam* and perspiring profusely. He was not an official or a rich man. Was it the reason that you did not praise him ?".²

The Swamiji's tone and his words were anything but gentle. In the first case, the offender was clumsy and careless in what he was doing. In the second, the wrong-doer was guilty of lowering the ideal of monasticism and measuring service done to the cause according to the materialistic scale of values. In both the cases, the Swamiji was eager to instil the spirit of true religion and the Mission in the minds of his followers and the inmates of the ashramas.

2. Swami Nirmalananda, Page 91 - 92





WITH HIS GURUBHAIS IN THE NORTH

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t was primarily to set right the legal status of the Bangalore ashrama that the Swamiji had planned to go to the Belur Math. Probably he had also thought of spending a few days during the *Pooja* festival with his *gurubhais* as well as his devotees in Calcutta. During this visit to the North, the Swamiji graciously permitted Sri. Madhuram Pillai and his brother, Sri Damodaran Pillai, his devotees from Mavelikkara to accompany him to Belur Math and the holy places in the North. He reached the Math with the two devotees early enough to witness the whole of the colourful *Pooja* festival. It is worth mentioning here that on his request the Holy Mother gave *mantra-deeksha* to both the devotees. They were also permitted to wash her holy feet and take home to Mavelikkara the *Charanaamritam*. Once again, the Swamiji showed that he was a great spiritual master and at the same time a perfect host. He had got all arrangements made for the comfortable stay of the two devotees from the South at Belur Math itself.

Besides the *Pooja* festival, the devotees from Kerala were fortunate to witness a rare scene – the Shiva dance by the Swamis of the Math including the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. Swami Premanandaji was to be seated as Shiva; but he insisted that Tulasi, his *gurubhai* should take the place. Swami Premanandaji himself garlanded his *gurubhai* and then all the swamis began to dance the ecstatic Shiva dance around him. The devotees from Kerala who saw the scene described it as a sight for the very Gods to see.' ¹ It might be that Swami Premanandaji had seen the all-loving, all - forgiving Shiva Himself in Swami Nirmalanadaji. Just the one incident that took place on the *Ratha - yathra* day would amply show his infinite love and kindness for the so-called sinners.

The Swamiji with some devotees was sitting in the verandah of the Math facing the Ganges and watching the boats carrying crowds of people bound to witness the Ratha - yatra pass by. One of the boats which moved quite close to the Math was full of men and women of very disreputable character and ways of life. They were a merry crew singing bawdy songs, clapping their hands and kicking their heels high at which one of the devotees made this indignant remark, "Look at these young people! They have no respect or reverence for the Math and no sense of shame to pass close by it in such company and in such a profligate manner. They ought to have behaved better in front of this sacred place."2 At this, the Swamiji spoke these words which revealed his soul's immensity, his infinite love and sympathy and his readiness to bestow his heart's blessings on those miserable wretches, "My Child! don't you know how full of misery this world is? If those poor fellows try to forget their misery and woe even for a short time in this manner, are they not to be pardoned and even congratulated ?" 3

The devotees who accompanied the Swamiji to the Math got several occasions to witness Swami Premanandaji's love for his *gurubhai* equalled only by the latter's deep devotion to the former who belonged to the *Iswarakotis*. About them the Swamiji once said, "Oh! they are all gods who have come down to the earth taking human bodies.... Once, in Dacca, Premanandaji pressed the shoulder of D - who was one of those discussing hotly. At once, his arguing attitude left him and his life was completely changed, transformed! Is this the work of an ordinary man?." Another incident indicating the greatness of Swami Premanandaji is as follows -

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda page 93

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 93

Once while the great Swami Vivekananda was explaining the significance of samadhi to some devotees in Belur Math, Swami Premanandali chanced to pass by that way. Raising his voice and pointing to his gurubhai, Swamiji Maharaj then exclaimed, 'Ah! there goes samadhi!'. Hearing this, Swami Premanandaji stood still, thrown into the state of samadhi! Such was the spiritual grandeur of Swami Premanandaji. Equally strong was his love for his gurubhai, Tulasi, for whose sake the inmates of the Math were served only the favourite dishes of Tulasi throughout his stay. He personally supervised the arrangements made to ensure Tulasi Maharaj's stay in the Math happy and comfortable.

The love and respect that the gurubhais felt for each other were so great that the scene of the leave-taking was touching and tearful. Swami Nirmalanandaji would fall at the feet of his gurubhai who would then raise him up and lovingly embrace him. They would then exchange a few words, when Tulasi Maharaj would fall at the feet of his gurubhai who would again raise him up and embrace him. This continued for some time showing how unwilling they were to part from each other. It was only after the sixth pranama that Tulasi Maharai could wrench himself free from the loving bosom of his great and god-like gurubhai.

The Swamiji, accompanied by the two devotees from Kerala, left the Math for Benares where the President Maharaj was staying at that time. After a few days when the Swamiji sought the permission of the President Maharaj to leave the place so that he could take the two devotees to holy places like Hardwar and Rishikesh, Sri Maharai stoutly opposed the idea of the Swamiji leaving him. He said, "Tulasi, you have seen those theerthas many a time; your friends can go and see those places without you. They will come back safely. You have come now to see me. The season is not quite good and you might fall ill if you go. I will not let you go away from me so soon...." Those words revealed Sri Maharai's warm love for his gurubhai whose stay with him for an extended period was what he valued most. For both of them, the power of attorney settling the legal status of the Bangalore ashrama became a matter of secondary importance for the time being.

So then, the two devotees had to go alone to the holy places. They reached Rishikesh where Swami Turiyanandaji, another gurubhai of the Swamiji, was staying at that time. Hearing that some devotees of his gurubhai had reached the place, Swami Turiyanandaji himself went to

where they were staying and called out, "Who is it that has come from Tulasi Maharaj?"6 As the devotees came out to touch his feet, he said, "Where is Tulasi Maharaj? Why has he not come with you? Should I not also see your Swamiji?" 7 The devotees were touched by the expressions of love and longing they noticed in the eyes of Swami Turiyanandaji which were eager to see his beloved gurubhai. After a few days' stay in Rishikesh, the devotees took leave of Swami Turiyanandaji and left the place for Benares by the way of Allahabad.

But what surprised them most was that before they returned to Benares, Swami Truiyanandaji had already reached there in spite of his failing health just to meet his gurubhai and spend a few happy days with The pure and profound love that bound the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna into a wonderful brotherhood was to be seen to be believed. The two devotees from Kerala had the good fortune to see for themselves how sweet and holy it was. They stayed on in Benares for a few more days witnessing the marvellous spectacle of the divine love of the gurubhais every day, before they returned to Bangalore accompanying Sri Swamiji.

6 and 7. Swami Nirmalananda, page 96.





THE AWAKENED KERALA

fter his return from the North, the Swamiji was waiting only for the birthday celebrations of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in Bangalore to be over before he could pay a visit to Kerala – this time to Quilandy in North Malabar. It was in April 1914 that the Swamiji accepted the local yoga Mutt gifted to the Mission as a centre for its activities. He had sent Bhakta Neelakanta from Tiruvalla to look after the affairs of the centre, but he had not found time to visit the place himself, an event which the public of the place had been looking forward to, for quite some time. Nor had the centre become an ashrama proper, for the ceremony consecrating it to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna had not been performed yet. It was precisely for this purpose of opening the first Ramakrishna ashrama in Malabar that the Swamiji started his journey to Quilandy. Breaking his journey at Ottapalam where he spent a few days with his devotees, he reached Quilandy on the 30th of March 1915.

The day fixed for the formal opening of the ashrama was the 31st of March 1915. Devotees in large numbers from all over Kerala and even

from South Canara had assembled there for the occasion. In a solemn atmosphere, the ritualistic ceremonies such as homam, pooja and recitals of the Vedic hymns were conducted under the direction of Swami Visuddhananda who had accompanied the Swamiji for the purpose. Daridra-Narayana-pooja (poor - feeding) also was conducted on a large scale. At the public meeting held in the afternoon, several devotees from all parts of Kerala spoke on the new religious awakening in the land in the context of the Ramakrishna movement. The day's programme was rounded off with a sparkling conversation class held by the Swamiji with his charateristic masterliness and brilliance. It was a grand one - day religious retreat and festival.

The Swamiji stayed on in Quilandy for a few days more giving instruction to the inmates of the ashrama in the matter of the future activities of the centre. Scores of devotees had the rare good fortune to sit at his holy feet, listen to his words of wisdom, courage and strength and to get his grace and blessings throughout his stay in Quilandy. The Swamiji was kind enough to visit Calicut and Tellicherry and bless the devotees in both the places this time also. However, it was on the devotees of Ottapalam that he chose to shower his blessings most by spending a few days with them on his journey back to Bangalore where he reached towards the middle of April 1915.

From his first visit to Haripad in 1911 to this visit to Quilandy in 1915. the Swamiji had made more than half a dozen trips to Kerala. During this period, he had founded three ashramas dedicated to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and the spreading of His message. He had journeyed from end to end of Kerala and met devotees and admirers belonging to every section of the society both in the urban and rural areas. He could discover everywhere an intense desire to know more of the true religion as lived by Sri Ramakrishna and interpreted by Swami Vivekananda. The thirst for knowledge of a life-giving religion could be quenched, the Swamiji found out, only by starting a religious journal in Malayalam which could disseminate the teachings of the spiritual Masters, both ancient and modern, on a systematic and permanent basis.

With this end in view, the Swamiji visited Quilon in the first week of August and discussed the matter with a group of devotees headed by Dr. Raman Tampi, Dr. Krishna Pillai, Sri. K. Padmanabhan Tampi and others. The suggestion met with immediate and enthusiastic support from one and all. Soon it was decided that the publication of the monthly should begin within a couple of months and that all preliminary arrangements be completed within that period. There was a good printing press in the town owned by a devotee of the Swamiji. Enough matter for the first two or three issues had to be prepared; a small working capital had to be raised and a couple of hundred subscribers enlisted. It was a workable proposition and the Swamiji was quite pleased that his suggestion had evoked such a favourable response.

The Swamiji also suggested that the name of the monthly should be "Prabuddha Keralam" or "Awakened Kerala", in content and character modelled on Prabuddha Bharatha or "Awakened India" founded by his Illustrious gurubhai, Swami Vivekananda. The devotees worked so well and so systematically that they could bring out the inaugural issue of Prabuddha Keralam on the auspicious Vijaya Dasami Day in Oct 1915. The monthly became immensely popular as it promised to serve the purpose admirably. Consequently, its circulation began to increase with every passing year. No doubt, it had problems in securing the services of a good managing editor and printer and so its place of publication had to be changed a few times. Yet, it continued to thrive as the foremost religious monthly in Malayalam besides becoming the nucleus of the Mission's publication division. It became the very useful channel through which the growing Ramakrishna -Vivekananda literature was made available to the Malayalam-reading public.

Owing to other more pressing preoccupations, the Swamiji was putting off a visit to Kottayam, a Christian centre, for a long time. This time, however, he decided to visit the place by accepting the invitation of Sri K. Padmanabhan Tampi, the Divisional Superintendent of Police who came to be known as Swami Parananda in later years. He was the mainstay of the local Ramakrishna Bhakta jana Sangham as well as the Ramakrishna Sunday School. When the Swamiji reached the town on the 7th August 1915, he was received at the southern entrance by the members of the Sangham, the teachers and students of the School and by a large number of the prominent citizens of the town. He was taken in a bhajan-procession to Sri. Tampi's residence where he accepted the pranams of a large number of devotees at his holy feet. He blessed them with his darshan. In the afternoon, he was kind enough to address the members of the Young Men's Hindu Association.

But it was at the after-lecture question -and- answer session held at the Rama Varma Union Club the next morning that the Swamiji was seen at his brilliant best. He was bombarded with tough and tricky gestions by the Hindus and non-Hindus alike, the believers as well as nonbelievers. And he answered them all with playful ease and masterly finality. For the entire audience it was their life-time experience whose memory they would be proud to preserve and cherish for ever and a day. The next morning he left for Alleppey where a group of ardent

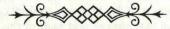
devotees inspired by his first visit four years earlier was engaged in serious study and sadhana. The Swamiji used to encourage them in their pursuits by meeting them on almost all his subsequent visits to Kerala. This time also his visit was for making enquiries about their spiritual progress and for giving them proper directions in their sadhana. During his short stay this time, several earnest seekers approached him for advice and guidance. He gladly helped them all in solving their problems in meditation and other spiritual exercises. Blessing his devotees there. he later left Alleppey for Trivandrum.

Reaching Trivandrum, the Swamiji lost no time in inspecting the five -acre hill site on which the proposed ashrama was to be built. It was situated at Nettayam, a few miles north-east of the city. He found that the location of the sylvan site, far away from the din and bustle of the city, was ideal for an ashrama that might remind one of the forest retreats of old. The owner of the land, Sri Arunachalam Pillai gladly offered it to the Swamiji who accepted the gift on the 23rd December 1915. The Swamiji soon set about supervising the work of clearing the place of its bushes and wild growth and levelling the ground. With his engineer-friend, Sri Hrishikesh Banerii, he discussed the details of the ashrama building such as its size, design and structural specialities. He wanted the ashrama in the Capital city to be the biggest and the most imposing one of its kind in Kerala, if not in the whole of South India.

To build an ashrama of such a magnitude was a task of such great challenge that the very thought of bringing together money, materials and man-power on that large scale would daunt the spirit of the most strong-willed. For example, it took seven strenuous years to complete that grand structure in granite. The cost of its construction rose from the original estimate of a modest seven thousand rupees to the awesome amount of over a lakh of rupees - surely, an astronomical figure in those days. And all this, without approaching a Maharaja or a merchant-prince or a rich landlord! It was possible because the Swamiji looked upon it as his life's work, his foremost sacred duty and his offering of worship on behalf of the devotees of Kerala at the lotus feet of the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, his elder gurubhai and the President of the Mission. Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj. As such, the Swamiji made up his mind that the foundation stone of the ashrama should be laid by none other than Sri Maharaj himself. Accordingly, the Swamiji decided to go to Belur Math and personally invite Sri Maharaj to Kerala.



SRI MAHARAJ BLESSES KERALA



ressing work of one kind or another kept the Swamiji so busy in the South that he found himself free to go to Belur Math only in May 1916. During this trip to the North, he was accompanied by Sri. Raman Tampi and Sri. Kunhirama Menon, two of his dearest devotees. In fact, the reason for his insistence on their making the trip with him was his love and grace for them, that they be blessed by Sri Maharaj with initiation. In spite of his poor health, Sri Maharaj gladly gave initiation to the two perfect strangers only because his beloved Tulasi requested him to do so. Sri Maharaj's readiness to accede to the request of his gurubhai would be seen repeated in a similar situation during his Kerala tour as well. In fact, if any devotee from Kerala had become the initiated disciple of Sri Maharaj or the Holy Mother, it was only because of the Swamiji's kind intercession. Like Sri Madhuram Pillai and Sri Damodaran Pillai on an earlier occasion, Dr Tampi and Sri. Menon this time

happened to be the eye-witnesses of the holy love which stood out as a unique feature of relationship found only among the brother-disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. They wondered, however, as to which was larger in this instance - Sri Maharaj's love for his gurubhai or the Swamiji's compassionate concern for the spiritual welfare of his devotees from Kerala.

The two devotees from Kerala had a fairly long stay at the Math enjoying sat-sang with the children of Sri Ramakrishna. However, they had to return hoping and praying that Sri Maharaj would agree to his gurubhai's request for visiting Kerala. The Swamiji could approach Sri Maharaj with the request only after the latter had fully regained his health. He had returned to the Math in bad shape after his long and strenuous tour of East Bengal. Finally when the Swamiji invited Sri Maharaj to the South, the latter gladly accepted the proposal. The first part of his journey was successfully completed when Sri Maharaj and party reached Bangalore in good health on the 12th of August 1916. Staying there for a little over three months during which he blessed hundreds of devotees, Sri Maharaj and party began their long-awaited tour of Kerala on the 25th of November 1916. His visit was to last full five weeks of bliss and blessedness for the devotees of Kerala.

At the same time, to undertake the responsibility of looking after the comfort and convenience of Sri Maharaj throughout the period was a task that called up all the energy and skill of the most accomplished organiser. But then, the Swamiji was a past-master in planning and executing the most ambitious, near-impossible projects. He was a super-man bursting with resourcefulness and self-confidence. He had chalked out a plan to the point of perfection even in its minutest detail and entrusted each part of it to the right person. The Swamiji had already visualised Sri Maharaj's tour to fall into a set pattern without the least risk of anything going wrong anywhere. Besides, it was no small privilege to serve Sri Maharaj for weeks on end; to be blessed by the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna was a boon to be gained by a life-time's sadhana. In this, the Swamiji himself set the example. He was all attention in tirelessly, cheerfully serving the son of God, now like an obedient servant and now like a humble disciple - a Hanuman or a Lakshmana serving Sree Ramachandra day and night.

The Swamiji had put Sri. Kunhirama Menon in overall charge of looking after the President Maharaj and party from Ottapalam to Alwaye

and again on their return journey from Ernakulam to Podanur. When the Madras-Mangalore Mail train carrying Sri Maharaj reached Olavakkode, the first stopping station in Kerala on the 26th of November 1916, the whole land seemed blessed with the presence of divinity in human shape. When the train halted at Ottapalam, Sri.V.K.Narayanan Nair, Swamiji's host in the town, was ready with the many vessels and baskets containing the rich and delicious Kerala feast prepared for Sri Maharaj and party. They were quickly and safely taken inside the compartment, a difficult task well-accomplished within the train's halting time of two minutes! Inside the compartment, the devotees fell prostrate at the holy feet of Sri Maharaj and Swamiji. As they stood respectfully aside and yet near enough to drink in the beatific faces of those two spiritual masters. they were thrilled at the thought that theirs was the rare privilege of which even the gods would feel truly envious!

At Shoranur Junction, the entire party got down and boarded the train bound for Ernakulam. There, Shri. Kunhirama Menon served Sri Maharaj his first meal in Kerala which the latter seemed to enjoy very much as he asked for more and more of the delicious dishes. After Sri Maharai finished his meal, the Swamiji and the other members of the party were served. The Swamiji was much pleased to find that everything went off very well and to the satisfaction of all. He not only openly expressed his appreciation of the sincere efforts of devotees like "V.K"; but even "congratulated Mr. Menon on his having served Maharaj with his own hands-for Maharaj could not take cooked food touched by all!"1

The devotees who had assembled on the platform to catch a glimpse of Sri Maharaj were more than satisfied that they could feast their eyes on his serene face lit up with a beatific smile. They felt themselves blessed that they could gaze on the divine vision till the train steamed out of the station. At Alwaye, Sri Maharaj was given a royal reception by the devotees from Travancore headed by Sri. Padmanabhan Tampi. They took him and party to the beautiful riverside bungalow arranged for their stay. Sri Maharaj was in such a happy mood that he was pleased even to address the gathering of devotees who went to him for his darshan! He spoke on a variety of subjects such as holy places, pilgrimages, the need for a guru, meditation etc. This was followed by a lively conversation class held by the Swamiji. Sri Maharaj was presented with an Address of Welcome by the inmates of the Advaita ashrama founded by Sri Narayana Guru.

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda - Page 103.

In the afternoon of the third day of Sri Maharaj's stay in Alwaye, he and the party left for Kottayam by a special motor boat. There he stayed for two pleasant days before leaving for Haripad by car. At Haripad, Sri Maharaj was given such a grand reception with *poornakumbham, nadaswaram, bhajan, palanquin* dance etc., that he playfully asked the Swamiji, "Am I going to be made a bride groom?". Reaching the ashrama, he exclaimed, "Ah! what a fine place!" ².. Evidently, he liked the atmosphere of the place so much that he stayed in the ashrama for four delightful days. It is to be pointed out here in this context that the Haripad ashrama has the double distinction of being the *first* Ramakrishna ashrama in Kerala and also the *only* ashrama sanctified by the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna with His stay.

From Haripad, Sri Maharaj and party were taken to Quilon where Dr.Raman Tampi had made all arrangements for their comfortable stay. In honour of Sri Maharaj's visit to the town, some two thousand Daridra-Narayanas were fed. Spending two happy days in Quilon, he was taken to Trivandrum where he was given a warm reception. A spacious bungalow with all modern amenities was chosen for the comfortable stay of Sri Maharaj, Sri Swamiji and party. A group of devotees headed by Dr.Padmanabha Pillai, Sri. M.R.Narayana Pillai, Dr.Tampi, Sri. Rama Warrier and others was in constant attendance on them.

The 9th of December 1916 was the day fixed for the laying of the foundation stone for the biggest and best Ramakrishna ashrama in the whole of South India. The site selected for the ashrama was a hill-top to which a temporary road was laid. Sri Maharaj, Sri Swamiji, a large team of *Swamis* and *brahmacharins* accompanied by devotees from several parts of Kerala were taken to the place by cars and by every type of available vehicle. All arrangements for the function were made inside a specially decorated *pandal* which was adorned by two large photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. When asked as to what materials were to be kept ready for the ceremony, Sri Maharaj replied, "Tulasi, you remember what Swamiji did at the Belur Math — a few flowers and the Ganges water. With these, if we invoke the Lord, He will respond and remain here permanently for the good of all"³

The auspicious hour fixed for the ceremony was 8 O'clock in the morning. After performing the worship of Sri Ramakrishna and the Vedic

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 106

^{3.} Swami NIrmalananda, Page 107

rites, Sri Maharaj laid the foundation stone for the most magnificent Ramakrishna ashrama in the South amid the chanting of hymns and Vedic prayers in an atmosphere of profound solemnity. After the function was over, Sri Maharaj was presented with three Addresses of Welcome -one in English and two in Sanskrit. But he remained silent, profoundly centred in the glory of his own blissful Self. When pressed to bless the large gathering of devotees with a few words, his simple response was, "I am too old to change into the European fashion of receiving Addresses and replying to them". 4 It was Swami Nirmalanandaji who suitably replied to the Addresses on behalf of his elder gurubhai.

The next day, Sri Maharaj was taken in a car to Kanyakumari where he reached by the evening. Early next morning, he visited the temple and offered worship at the feet of the Mother. As he stood there before the Mother telling the beads, he fell into samadhi with his body motionless and his gaze fixed on Her. Gradually, he came to the plane of the senses when he went round the shrine and then sat down for japa before returning to the bungalow for rest. It was the beginning of a navaratri celebration, a nine-day observance of tapasya in Kanyakumari where he felt the living presence of the Divine Mother.

Sri Maharaj used to go to the temple both morning and evening, accompanied by the Swamiji and a group of Swamis, brahmacharins and devotees. He would sit before the Mother lost in ecstasy and the devotees would sing devotional songs. Sometimes he would clap his hands and call out, 'Ma-Ma' - 'Mother, Mother'. Often he would remain in samadhi, a total stranger to the world outside. Whenever Sri Maharaj was seen coming out of the temple, a large number of sick and suffering beggars would approach him for alms. He would then turn to the Swamiji who was sure to be seen walking by his side with an open bag full of coins. Sri Maharaj would then give armfuls of money to the poor with his face beaming with a gracious smile. One day, he spoke to the group of devotees accompanying him on the last days of Sri Guru Maharaj and on samadhi on another day. On yet another day, he performed the Kumari-pooja — worshipping a few unmarried girls with flowers, food and clothes.

Sri Maharaj's visit to Kerala was notably significant in one respect: the profuse prodigality with which he blessed a large number of fortunate

^{4.} Swami NIrmalananda, Page108

souls with mantra-deeksha. They were those sent to him by his beloved gurubhai, Tulasi—those devotees who had served the Cause with self-denying zeal and devotion. As a rule, Sri Maharaj was very careful and critical in choosing the candidates for initiation. There were instances, it is said, where even those recommended by his gurubhais like Swamis Premanandaji, Shivanandaji and Saradanandaji were found unacceptable to him — they were directed to take refuge in the all-merciful Holy Mother! But here in Kanyakumari and again in Quilon and Haripad, Sri Maharaj seemed to have thrown caution to the winds but placed absolute trust in the judgement of his dear gurubhai, Tulasi.

Sri Maharaj might probably have thought that Tulasi's loving concern for the spiritual advancement of the simple-minded devotees of Kerala was merit enough. And all those whom Tulasi chose to send to him were initiated without the least hesitaion. Prominent among those fortunate souls blessed by Sri Maharaj were Swamis Purushottamananda, Sukhananda, Agamananda, Sarvasree Subbaraya Iyer, Seshadri Iyer, Chandrasekhara Pillai, Dr.Raman Tampi, V.K. Narayanan Nair and Kunhirama Pathiyar. It can be stated without any exaggeration that at the request of no other gurubhai, and in no other part of the land were so many devotees given initiation by Sri Maharaj as in Kerala at the instance of Swami Nirmalanandaji. The devotees of Kerala were perfect strangers to him and in a few cases he had agreed to initiate them even when he was ill and had sent word that the ceremony was called off. On all such occasions, it was Tulasi Maharaj's plea on behalf of the devotees that had prevailed. To them, his advice was "to go and hear what Swami Nirmalanandaji was saying. That will do you good". 5 This was ample proof of the unique relationship of love and trust which existed between the two gurubhais of Sri Ramakrishna.

The Swamiji, on his part, saw to it that in carrying out the least behest of Sri Maharaj, the devotees of Kerala spared no pains. So alert and wide awake were they that they had eyes and ears only for the comfort of Sri Maharaj throughout his Kerala tour. In this, the Swamiji himself set the example. He was in constant attendance on him ready with whatever he needed and following him like his own faithful shadow. No emperor could have asked for more in devoted service and in securing a life of comfort and ease. The Swamiji used to speak of Sri Maharaj to his devotees thus: "He belongs to the type of the old *Rishis* and you should approach him

^{5.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 124

with deep devotion and humility".6 In fact, the Swamiji looked upon Sri Maharaj as Sri Ramakrishna Himself as was evident from his words, "This time, service to Maharaj is my sadhana. To look to his convenience and comfort is my sole concern." Again, he told 'bhakta', "Here is your living God; worship him by Service."8 But it is to be remembered that the Swamiji's sadhana in the form of loving service to his elder gurubhai was not so much for his sake as for the hundreds of good souls in Kerala who were blessed with the serene vision of the son of God and the grace of the living God, Swami Brahmanandaii Maharai.

The President Maharaj and party left Kanyakumari for Quilon on the 20th of December 1916. After a few days' pleasant stay there, Sri Maharaj, at the end of the five-week tour of Kerala, was ready for his return journey to Bangalore via Ambalappuzha and Ernakulam on the 30th of December. Sri. Kunhirama Menon was ready to take charge of Sri Maharaj and party at Ernakulam and escort them up to Podanur by the Mail train. When the train reached Ottapalam, a gathering of devotees was there to pay their respectful pranams to Sri Maharaj. One of them, Sri. C. Kunhiraman Nair offered him a few specially prepared rice - cakes stuffed with coconut scrapings, sugar and spices. Sri Maharaj ate the biggest one with great relish and appeared delighted like a simple child. However, the great good fortune of the devotees of Ottapalam cannot be overlooked. It was given to them to offer to Sri Maharaj his first and his last bhiksha during his visit to Kerala. The Swamiji accompanied him to Bangalore and then again to Madras in the second week of January 1917 at the conclusion of Sri Maharaj's sanctifying visit to the South lasting nearly five months.



^{6.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 124

^{7.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 109

^{8.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 110



WORK, AND MORE WORK.

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oon after the Swamiji's return from Madras where he had gone accompanying Sri Maharaj and party, he fell ill. Even after the recovery, one thing or another kept him busy in Bangalore and so he was able to leave for Trivandrum only months later, in July 1917. It seemed that ever since the foundation stone for the ashrama was laid by Sri Maharaj, his only thought was to complete its construction. It should be the most magnificent ashrama in the whole of South India, worthy of the great name it was to bear - of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna. He looked upon the work as his personal responsibility and so he made it a point to visit Trivandrum more than once every year, so that, under his direct supervision, the collection of money and materials, largely from people belonging to the middle class, would be a lot easier. No doubt, in this task he was ably and whole-heartedly assisted by a large number of his life-long devotees and admirers like Dr. Raman Tampi, Sri. M.R. Narayana Pillai, Sri. K. Raman Menon and others. Yet, his inspiring presence was found necessary to speed up the work.

The Swamiji's stay in Trivandrum each time he visited it, lasted a few months which gave the devotees the rare opportunity of attending his daily meditation and conversation classes. They were also able to see his many – splendoured personality, as a severe task - master and a compassionate *guru*, as a *Jnani* and a *Karma - Yogi* and what is more, as a great *bhakta*. In one of the classes during this visit, the Swamiji was waxing eloquent on the power of Sri Hanuman's *brahmacharya* and his *prema-bhakti* when suddenly the treasure of devotion he had kept hidden in his heart emptied itself in a flood of divine love - tears! After a while when he regained his poise, he said, "Sri Swamiji is the modern Hanuman. Don't you know, before going to the West he wrote to the Holy Mother that he felt like Mahavira going to Lanka with the ring, the message of the Master?"

But Trivandrum was not the only place which demanded his presence. The whole of India had become his field of activity. Consequently, he had to be constantly on the move in the South as well as in the North, visiting nearby centres like Ponnampet, Madras, Salem, Coonoor and those in Kerala as well as the distant ones like Calcutta, Patna, Benares, Lucknow, Dacca and Shillong. So then, giving directions for the work to be speeded up in Trivandrum, he left the place on the 26th of October 1917 for a round of visits to the centres in Malabar. Everywhere, he was received with great devotion and zeal. His presence was found to have the magical effect of gradually bringing even the scoffers to a religious way of life. He returned to Bangalore in the first week of November to keep himself busy with meditation and religious classes, religious festivals and birthday celebrations.

Early in March 1918, the Swamiji visited Coorg from where he went to Quilandy in Malabar to bless the birthday celebrations of Sri Guru Maharaj with his presence. From there, he went to Quilon but returned to Bangalore without visiting Trivandrum owing to extreme physical exhaustion. However, after a few months' rest, he visited Trivandrum in September to put new life into the work of building the ashrama there. In May 1919, he visited the place again as also all the important centres in Kerala and went as far as Mangalore in South Canara. On the 13th of June 1919, he laid the foundation stone of the ashrama in Salem on the site offered to the Swamiji by Sri.Namagiri lyer. Returning to Bangalore, he opened the Students' Home attached to the ashrama on the 3rd of August 1919.

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 115

It is to be noted here that for about two years from the middle of 1917, the Swamiji was managing the work of the Bangalore ashrama with the help of just two other inmates – a swami and a *brahmacharin*. For a few months in 1918, they took turns to go on pilgrimage to North India. On the 12th of August 1919, the Swamiji wrote to Bhakta Neelakanta to say that for the past many months, he was doing 'the work of the cook, the dish-washer and the sweeper, ... no leisure at all to write any more. Quite tired'.² It was under these circumstances that the Swamiji entertained Dr.Tampi and family in the ashrama during the Christmas of 1918. They were overwhelmed with his love and kindness in making their stay comfortable and happy. Swami Yatiswarananda has gone on record as saying that he found in the Swamiji an ideal host and that it was from the Swamiji that he learnt his lessons in hospitality.

When the Swamiji got the services of an excellent cook and servant in the ashrama by the end of 1919, he felt free to pay a visit to Kerala early in 1920. On his way, he halted in Salem and Ottapalam for a few days before reaching Trivandrum. There he stayed for about ten days supervising the building work of the ashrama and then left for Haripad where he spent a few days teaching and training the *brahmacharins*. It seemed that the most important work before him during this visit to Kerala was moulding the inmates of the ashramas to become the worthy servants of Sri Ramakrishna in every way. However, he found time to visit the old centres and meet the old devotees in Kerala besides forging new links of love for spreading the message of the Master on a vaster scale.

Soon after his return to Bangalore from the Kerala tour, he received the sad news that the Holy Mother was seriously ill. The Mother's condition was becoming critical, almost hopeless with each passing day. Alarmed at the news, the Swamij started for Calcutta and as soon as he reached there, he had *darshan* of the Mother. It became obvious to him that the light and life of the entire Ramakrishna movement had already become feeble and begun to flicker. The inevitable would take place before long and so did it happen – the light went out: the Holy Mother entered *Mahasamadhi* at 1.30 in the morning of the 20th July 1920. The Swamiji, like the other children of the Mother, felt orphaned. To get some relief, he went to Benares where he had spent his boyhood. Not getting any solace from there, he decided to go to Sri Maharaj who was staying at Bhuvaneswer at that time. Staying with him for a few days, the Swamiji

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 119

regained his old composure to a great extent but fell ill with a severe attack of influenza. Recovering from it, he returned to Bangalore in the third week of September 1920 to continue the work of Sri Guru Maharaj from where he had left it off.

What prompted the Swamiji to work with renewed energy and zeal was the prospect of Sri Maharaj's visit to Kerala a second time during his visit to Madras in January 1921 to open the Students' Home there. Sri Maharaj had promised the Swamiji that he would happily spend the whole summer of that year with him in Bangalore. The Swamiji thought that he could make use of that occasion for persuading Sri Maharaj to visit Kerala and get the ashrama in Trivandrum opened by him. Thereby many hundreds of devotees in Kerala would get blessed with his darshan. It was an occasion so rare and precious that he could not let it slip through his fingers on any account.

With this in view, the Swamiji began to correspond with the devotees and active workers at the different centres in Kerala – 'Bhaktan', Dr. Tampi, Sri. M.R.Narayana Pillai, Sri. Kunhirama Menon, Sri. Sankara Menon and others. His purpose was two-fold: firstly, to enthuse the devotees to get the ashrama building ready for opening and secondly to make the journey and stay of the physically weak and ageing Sri Maharaj perfectly comfortable, even to the point of being luxurious. The work of the ashrama building was progressing satisfactorily and Sri. Kunhirama Menon, helped by the leading devotees of Malabar and Travancore, had made all arangements of Sri Maharaj's tour of Kerala perfect. It only required Sri Maharaj's consent for his much-awaited visit to go through.

After the opening of the Students' Home in Madras, Sri Maharaj, accompanied by the Swamiji, reached Bangalore where he enjoyed staying right through the summer and monsoon months till the *Navaratry* festival in October 1921. He seemed so eager to bless the devotees in Kerala that he readily agreed to go to Trivandrum and Kanyakumari when the Swamiji approached him with the request. Sri Maharaj also made cheerful enquiries about his tour of Kerala when Sri. Kunhirama Menon met him in Bangalore. In his letter to Sri. Sankara Menon written on the 25th of July, the Swamiji had conveyed the welcome news of Sri Maharaj agreeing 'to halt at Ottapalam on our way for a couple of days and enjoy your kind hospitality'. But in his letter of 7th September, the Swamiji wrote that owing to Sri Maharaj's failing health, to his desire to spend

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 125

the *Navaratri* days in Madras and above all, to the Mopla rebellion raging in Malabar, Sri Maharaj would take the Madura route to Trivandrum, but 'on his way back, he will take the Shoranur line and halt at Ottapalam....'4.

Before Sri Maharaj and Party left for Madras, Sri Mahapurushaji summed up the situation regarding the Kerala tour thus: "If it be the will of God, we shall come". After the Navaratri festival, Sri Maharaj cancelled his Kerala tour for no obvious reason and left Madras for Calcutta. At this thoroughly unexpected turn of events, the Swamiji was deeply disappointed and was hard put to console his devotees in Kerala who were breathless with the expectation of getting blessed with the darshan of the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna along with two of his gurubhais. Shortly afterwords, he left for Trivandrum to cheer up the devotees there with his presence. He stayed there for more than a month meeting devotees also from the other centres of Travancore and giving them proper guidance regarding their programme of work in the days ahead.

It was when the Swamiji was staying in Trivandrum that the news reached him that Sri Maharaj was seriously ill. At once, he decided to return to Bangalore with a day's stop-over at Ottapalam. There he got a telegram re-directed from Bangalore conveying the news that Sri Maharaja's condition was critical. The Swamiji had decided to start for Calcutta the very same evening, 10th April 1922 – when another telegram was put into his hands, which read, 'Saradananda wires, Maharaj entered Mahasamadhi 9th Monday night'⁶. The news broke his heart and collapsing into a chair, he began to weep like a child in uncontrollable grief. The next day, he left for Trivandrum where he stayed for about two weeks. Observing the samaradhana of Sri Maharaj with special *Pooja* and poor-feeding, the Swamiji left for Bangalore towards the end of April 1922.

^{4, 5} and 6 : Swami Nirmalananda , Page 126, 127





UNTIRED FEET, UNWEARY HEART

t was the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmananda who had sent the Swamiji to Bangalore years ago . And now, he has left the world within two years of the passing away of the Holy mother. It seemed that the Swamiji had lost all interest in his work. But the letters of Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj consoling and encouraging him as well as the last words of Swamiji Maharaj still ringing in his ears acted as a force of sweet compulsion to carry on the work of Sri Guru Maharaj with untired feet and unweary heart. So, towards the end of 1922, he visited Quilandy and some other centres in Malabar, making a brief stop-over in Coimbatore on the way. He visited Quilandy again in March 1923 to preside over Bhagavan's birthday celebrations. On this occasion, he spent a day with the Raja of Kadathanad and his family who had become his ardent devotees.

On his return journey, he visited Coonoor where he was taken to a temple maintained by the Harijans in a nearby village. He was agreeably

surprised to find the photos of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda along with those of the other deities kept in the shrine for worship. He visited also Gobichettipalayam to preside over the anniversary of the Vivekananda Society there. His eloquent Presidential address as well as the short question - and - answer session which followed impressed and more than satisfied the large, educated audience present on the occasion.

Early in June 1923, the Swamiji visited Quilandy and some other centres in Malabar before proceeding to Trivandrum where the work of the ashrama was nearing completion. All that remained to be done was the shrine room with its artistically designed door and the throne for Sri Guru Maharaj. Pleased with the progress of the work, he returned to Bangalore on the 15th of June. For the next six months, Swamiji concentrated his attention on the work in Bangalore, Ponnampet and the other centres in Mysore for the spiritual welfare of those devotees who had taken refuge in him. His physical stamina and will - power were, no doubt,tremendous, but over the years, he was drawing on his strength and energy far beyond what was stored up. The result was that by the time he reached Trivandrum early in December 1923,he was so seriously ill that he had to be taken care of by Dr. Tampi. Intensive treatment and careful nursing for over a week improved his condition appreciably. A few more days of complete rest helped him regain his normal health. As soon as he was found fit for travelling he proceeded to Haripad to perform what might be described as a novel and unique ceremony which was the main purpose of his visit to Kerala this time.

Quite a few young men had given up their all and become inmates of the ashramas. A few others had remained unmarried to become active workers of the Mission. Attracted by his personality, they had been working for the cause for long years now. All of them were pure and pious souls aspiring for a spiritual life. The Swamiji thought that it was time for him to accept them as his own by giving them sanyasa. The established practice was for the President of the Mission to give initiation and sanyasa to spiritual aspirants. But the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji, during his last visit to Bangalore, had empowered his beloved Tulasi to give both these to deserving devotees instead of sending them to distant Belur Math. So, the Swamiji decided to give sanyasa to eleven senior brahmacharins and inmates of the ashramas and take upon himself the responsibility of their spiritual welfare.

During the auspicious pre-dawn hours on the 23rd of December 1923, the eleven candidates chosen by the Swamiji for the monastic life and belonging to the different castes and classes of society performed the *Viraja homa* according to the Vedic rules and as directed by the Swamiji. They then took the vow of *sanyasa* and recieved the *kashaya* elothes as well as the monastic names from the Swamiji. Falling at the feet of the Swamiji, his monastic disciples accepted him as their *guru* and God.

Seldom was the Swamiji seen in such an exalted mood as on this occasion. In fiery words, he spoke on the spirit of sanyasa and of the sanyasins belonging to the Ramakrishna order, which may be summed up thus: "Real sanyasa is not giving up, it is taking in; the sanyasin takes the whole universe as his heritage. The son of man becomes the child of God; he gets the entire creation as his relations. It is not fleeing from misery but daring to see God. The sanyasin gets His vision, lives in perpetual joy and conveys peace and happiness to all...I have merely entrusted them to Sri Guru Maharaj and He will lead themI am a mere tool, a mere gramophone. Swami Vivekananda was the great pipe through which the ideas of Sri Guru Maharaj flowed. We are all small pipes....."

The Swamiji advised the new sanyasins as to how to conduct themselves in the world: "Be like the postmen. The letters may be very important but not the postmen who deliver them. You are to deliver the ideas of Sri Guru Maharaj and Swamiji, not as teachers but as delivery peons". After performing all the important ceremonies of giving sanyasa, the Swamiji left for Bangalore, making a short stop-over in Coonoor on the way. One notable event during his three-month stay in Bangalore was his giving sanyasa to two brahmacharins there. They had worked lovingly and long for the cause of Sri Ramakrishna. They were given the monastic names, Desikananda and Shambavananda.

The Swamiji looked upon the completion and consecration of the Brahmananda ashrama, Trivandrum as his unfinished mission in life. The heart-warming news that the magnificent granite structure was completed reached him until at last. He fixed the date of its consecration for the 7th March of 1924, the eighty-ninth birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. The Swamiji seemed proud of it as his life's achievement

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda page 132

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda page 132 - 133

and could not brook any adverse comment on it. Reacting to the reported observation of Sir Puttanna Chetty – 'a smaller building costing much less would have been sufficient and the surplus amount collected could have been invested for carrying on the work of the institution' – the Swamiji said:

"Yes, yes,men are of different views. A pucca granite building in the name of Sri Guru Maharaj will last for years.....Do you not see the grand old temples in South India ?They remain intact to this day......Don't think the ancients were wasting money on temples.That also has its use. Further, I do not want to make *sadhus* Babus! They would become victims of the evils of wealth. That is why I did not provide funds for future management. The *sadhus* must command the hearty support of the people.If they fail to get such support, let them starve".⁴ Incidentally, these words of the Swamiji brought out his views on the *sanyasi*householder relationship in supporting and maintaining the local ashramas.

The consecration ceremony was celeberated like a grand religious festival with devotees from far and near flocking to the ashrama. Vedic homa, chanting of hymns, recitation of His holy names and bhajans made the atmosphere spiritually vibrant. At the appointed, auspicious hour, the Swamiji installed the photos of Bhagavan, the Holy Mother, Swamiji Maharaj and Sri Raja Maharaj in the shrine tastefully decorated with flowers and garlands. Then he opened the door of the well-lit shrine room to perform the arati. Thereafter, all those who wanted to worship Bhagavan with flowers and fruits were permited to do so. The ashrama was named Brahmananda Ashrama and dedicated to the memory of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, the first President of the Mission and the foremost Iswarakoti-disciple as well as the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna.

The celebration continued till the 16th of March 1924.On that day, the ashrama was formally inaugurated before a large and distinguished gathering of devotees. At the public meeting held in the afternoon, the Swamiji, in the course of his eloquent Presidential Address, praised the munificence of well-to - do devotees like Sri. K.Raman Menon as also of the poor woman who donated her nose ring

which was all that she could call her own in this world! He said that the ashrama was theirs and that it was up to them to make use of its calm and serene atmosphere for their spiritual progress.

A few days after the celebrations in the ashrama, the Swamiji shifted the office of the *Prabuddha-Keralam* to the garden-house in Alleppey gifted by Sri. P.G.Govinda Pillai. He was not a believer in religion, to start with, but only an admirer of the Swamiji. He had held long and intelligent discussions with the Swamiji on matters of philosophy and religion each time they had met. His intellectual brilliance prompted him to argue and disagree with the Swamiji who was pleased to encourage him to question and differ from the orthodox religious points of view. Sri. Pillai woke up until at last to realise the greatness of the Swamiji and to be his faithful and devoted follower.

Besides getting the office of the magazine transferred to the new premises, the Swamiji placed a photo of Sri Ramakrishna in a room in the house for daily worship. The place came to be known as *Yogananda Ashrama* which the Swamiji formally opened in June that year. One of his ardent devotees, Seth Khatau Khimji belonged to Alleppey and it was he who gifted coir matting worth thousands of rupees for use in the ashramas in Kerala, Bangalore and Calcutta. During this visit to Kerala, Swamiji laid the foundation stone of the ashrama in Muttom which was dedicated to the memory of another *Iswarakoti* - disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Premananda and named after him.





AWAKENING THE MOTHERLAND

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t was in April 1924 that the Swamiji returned to Bangalore after his Kerala tour. However, he could attend to his normal work there only for two months, for news reached him in early July that large parts of Kerala were hit by devastating floods. Many lives were washed away; hundreds were rendered homeless, most of them having lost their life's earnings. The Swamiji sent two swamis of the ashrama with a few thousand rupees to Kerala for flood relief work. He also wrote to the swamis in the Trivandrum and Alleppey ashramas to join the swamis from Bangalore and undertake flood relief measures in a big way. The swamis, ably assisted by householder–devotees were able to distribute among the poor victims Rs. 20,000/- in cash, besides a large quantity of rice, clothes and medicines. The relief work lasted till the end of the year.

It was when the two swamis of the ashrama were away in Kerala that Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, the President of the Mission and party reached Bangalore. The Swamiji had to arrange for their comfortable stay

in the ashrama for about two weeks almost single-handed. And then, within days of Mahapurushaji and party leaving Bangalore for Madras, the Swamiji received a call from Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, Secretary of the Mission asking him to go to Calcutta to discuss and decide various organisational matters in the aftermath of the passing away of Sri Raja Maharaj who was the soul and spirit of the Mission for more than two eventful decades. The Swamiji lost no time in starting for Calcutta where he reached by the end of August 1924. Actively participating in the deliberations at the meeting of the Trustees and holding discussions with his gurubhais and the senior office-bearers of the Math and Mission, the organisational matters were soon settled and given a good shape for effective functioning.

Thereafter, for the next ten months till May 1925, the Swamiji was constantly on the move from one centre to another inspiring the people with his masterly presentation of the message of Sri Guru Maharaj. He was moving about among the people like a generous dharma-megha, the spiritual rain-cloud showering blessings and grace with his holy presence as well as with his words of great power and wisdom. On his way from Calcutta to Benares, the Swamiji staved for a few days at Patna where scores of educated men and women became his devotees. Prominent among them were Prof. Nandipati Mukherji, Shambu Brahmeswar Prasad and his wife, Dheerendrananth Dutt, nephew of Kiran Chandra Dutt, Srimati Annapurna Devi and her daughter etc. Prof. Nandipati Mukherji was given initiation in Patna while the others were initiated in a holy place just outside the city of Benares. Visiting some other centres like Chapra, Sewan and Lucknow during his first tour of U.P and Bihar, the Swamiji returned to Calcutta for a few days' rest before leaving it on a tour of East Bengal and Assam.

Not much work was done in East Bengal, the birthplace of Nag Mahasay, the most austere and ascetic householder - disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. It was largely true also of Assam, and in neither place was there any general awakening in the context of the Ramakrishna -Vivekananda movement. There was a Ramakrishna ashrama in Dacca, but somehow it could not make much headway in creating and sustaining an interest in the Neo-Vedantic message of Sri Ramakrishna. The Swamiji stayed in the ashrama for a fairly long time, inspiring hundreds with his illuminating lectures and conversations. He also visited Mymensingh and Comilla, Shillong, Barisal and a few other

places attracting crowds of people to listen to his lectures, classes and conversations. Influenced by his magnetic personality, several young men gave up the world and joined the order to become in after-years senior sanyasins serving the cause in various capacities with distinction in India and abroad. Many more were fortunate to become his disciples. He made it a point to visit these centres as also the new ones each time he visited the North on subsequent occassions. One such new centre was the Mymensingh ashrama started by the Swamiji's disciples after his first visit in 1924-'25.

We have already seen that the Swamiji was able to electrify audiences of all types with his brilliance as a religious teacher, a speaker and a conversationalist. In fact, what attracted the people to him even more powerfully was his serene, majestic presence, his self-denying simplicity and purity of character as well as his boundless love obvious in every little act of his; his zeal and devotion in spreading the message of the Master, and above all, his genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of those who sought refuge in him. He was never seen putting on the airs of an awesome, unapproachable *guru*; he was more an amiable and elderly companion to all his sincere devotees. It was in this light that most of the grown-up devotees who did not bother much about high philosophical questions looked upon him. They were quite happy and contented to be in his blissful presence, for they could not ask for more!

This was particularly true in the case of children who neither knew nor cared to know anything about the Swamiji's spiritual grandeur. All that they knew and were happy to know was that he was their playmate who was endlessly fond of them. They too loved him, a lot more than they loved their own parents. They wanted nothing as much as they wanted to be with him who on his part seemed quite happy to be laughing and playing with them, like one among them! But all the time, the Swamiji was teaching them spirituality without ever letting the little ones know that they were learning valuable lessons from their playmate. They hardly knew, for how could they, that he was a specialist in teaching spirituality in the kindergarten classes! It was not their head but their heart which the Swamiji had touched and conquered with consummate skill and success.

At the end of his successful ten-month tour of the North, the Swamiji returned to Bangalore via Bombay where he stayed for a few days as the guest of his ardent devotees, Sir Iswar Das and Seth Purushottam Das.

Their only prayer was that the Swamiji be kind enough to bless their home with the dust of his holy feet. And all that they wanted was to serve him and fulfil even his smallest wishes. Unknown to the public and even to the Swamiji's other devotees, they had come out with liberal financial help in providing several amenities to the many ashramas in Kerala besides regularly helping a large number of poor students and widows till such time as they are able to stand on their own feet. He reached Bangalore in May 1925 and almost immediately set about supervising the increased activities of the ashrama and of the Students' Home attached to the ashrama in particular. He stayed on in Bangalore till July when he started on a tour of Kerala.

The Swamiji had not visited any centre in Kerala for well over an year now. This time, he visited every ashrama and centre beginning with Ottapalam (V.K's house) and staying in each place for a few days before reaching Trivandrum towards the end of August 1925. The ashrama building required a little extension and some urgent repairs. Besides, the hilly ground had to be cleared of weeds and bushes and levelled; a garden had to be planned and some fruit-bearing trees planted. The Swamiji stayed in the ashrama for over a month planning and supervising the work. Sri. Sankara Menon, nephew of the late Sri. K. Raman Menon who had donated handsomely to the ashrama building fund, offered Rupees Three Thousand in memory of his uncle for daily worship in the ashrama. The Swamiji accepted it and had it put in the bank as fixed deposit in the name of the Swami - in - charge of the ashrama. During this visit, he gave sanyasa to a batch of seven senior brahmacharins. He also opened the Premananda Ashrama at Muttom before returning to Bangalore via Madras in the first week of October.

Shortly afterwards the Swamiji accepted an invitation from Sri. C. Chengappa, one of his faithful devotees, and visited Ponnampet in Coorg for the third time. During this visit it was all but decided that an ashrama should be started there. The Swamiji was gracious enough to initiate Sri. Chengappa and two of his relations at Virajpet on this occasion. He returned to Bangalore only to receive Swami Saradanandaiji Maharaj's urgent and pressing invitation to proceed to Calcutta forth with in connection with the convention of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission which was to be held early next year. Yielding to the pressure of his beloved gurubhai, the Swamiji left for Calcutta and reached there on the 2nd of December.

Within a short time, he completed the work of assisting his gurubhais

and some senior swamis entrusted with the task of preparing the procedures and preliminary formalities of the Convention. However, it was found that the Convention could not be held before May 1926. Therefore, the Swamiji thought of making use of the intervening period for re-visiting those ashramas and centres which he had visited the previous year. Successfully completing the tour in which he renewed the old ties and forged new ones, he returned to the Math on time to participate in the Convention.

More important than the several decisions taken after due deliberation at the Convention were the informal meetings generally held in the evening hours after each day's official work was completed. They proved to be of 'inestimable value' both to the young delegates to the Convention as well as to the large number of devotees who visited the Math. Those who led the discussions were "Swamis Shivananda, Saradananda, Vijnanananda, Abhedananda, Subodhananda and Nirmalananda - all of whom had sat at the feet of the Master.... and many confessed that they might not have a similar experience in their life-time again...." 1 After the Convention, the Swamiji returned to Bangalore on time to receive Mahapurushaji and party. After three weeks' stay in Bangalore, he accompanied Mahapurushaji to Madras on the 18th of November. On the 20th, he gave a talk to the inmates of the Mission's Students' Home. The next day, he held a brilliant conversation class at the Math. Completing his four days' stay at the Madras Math, the Swamiji returned to Bangalore on the 22nd of November 1926.



^{1.} Prabuddha Bharata, May 1926, Page 223, Quoted in Swami Nirmalananda, Pages. 146 - 147



TWO NEW ASHRAMAS

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or more than one decade now, since his first visit to Ottapalam in 1914, the Swamiji had been visiting the place once every year and staying as "V.K's guest" for a few days. During this long period, a large number of pure souls had become his devotees and followers. They considered themselves blessed for having had the good fortune to serve the Swamiji and the Cause in every possible way with sincere devotion. It was only natural, therefore, that the devotees had begun to think seriously of the benefit of having an ashrama in the town or its neighbourhood. About this time, a few Nambudiris (Malayali brahmins) and their families, ostracised and uprooted from their birthplace by the laws of orthodoxy called Smartha-Vichara which was more senseless and inhuman than the practice of untouchability, had settled down in a village called Palappuram (now known as Sri Ramakrishna Nagar) some two miles south-east of the town of Ottapalam. They were planning to build a small temple when they came to know of the proposal for a Ramakrishna ashrama. They felt convinced that an ashrama with the Swamiji staying there for a few days once or more every year would be the condition ideally suited for their spiritual progress. The Swamiji was gracious enough to accept the offer of the site for an ashrama there.

The ashrama building was to come up on an elevated ground commanding a magnificent view to the west — of the smooth-flowing Bharatha river and the extensive paddy fields beyond, bordered by hills covered with tall grass and plants and tufts of forest trees. In 1925, the owner and occupant of the land, Sri.A.K.T.K.M. Vasudevan Nambudiripad* gifted the four - acre land with a half- finished building on it as also an old, tumbled-down temple with a magnificent image of Gadadhar Vishnu. Liberal donations from devotees like Sri. K. Sankara Menon and Smt. K.P. Parukkutty Amma helped in getting the ashrama building ready for opening on the 10th of December 1926. At the auspicious hour fixed for the purpose, the Swamiji opened the ashrama and consecrated it to the worship of Bhagavan according to Vedic procedures and to the accompaniment of the singing of bhajans and the recitation of His holy names. A shivalingam found in the old temple was made into an idol of Shiva with five faces (Pancha- mukha - shiva). The Swamiji installed the idol in a newly - built Shiva temple close by on a later occasion.

The centre which held great promise for an ashrama to come up in Mysore was Ponnampet in Coorg. The Swamiji was invited to visit the place and to lay the foundation stone for the ashrama there. The ashrama building was completed in the record time of four months and the Swamiji performed its opening ceremony on the 10th of June 1927. In the course of a talk with the devotees on the occasion, the Swamiji expressed the hope that many more ashramas would come to be established in Coorg, if Sri Guru Maharaj so willed. It was up to the devotees, therefore, to keep themselves ready to be His worthy instruments.

Returning from Ponnampet, the Swamiji visited Tellicherry on the 12th and reached Ottapalam on the 14th of June 1927. He spent three days in the ashrama mainly engaged in tending the flower gardens and planting mango seedlings in the ashrama compound. On the 17th of June, the Swamiji left for Trivandrum where he had planned to spend a few months teaching and training the inmates of the ashramas in Travancore and giving sanyasa to the deserving brahmacharins among them. He had also a large number of women devotees and disciples in

^{*} The venerable father of the writer of this book.

Trivandrum and its neighbourhood and he wanted to give them a spiritual orientation. As advised by the Swamiji, they used to have regular weekly meetings in their own houses by turns for religious discussions and for poola and bhajan. Subsequently, they formed themselves into the Hindu Vanita Sangham to conduct their religious programmes with greater organisational efficiency.

Taking advantage of the Swamiji's stay in the ashrama, the devotees invited him to address the Sangham, a gathering consisting of women only. In his talk, he encouraged them to continue their weekly meetings which would help form a religious relationship among themselves and their families besides their neighbours. He asked them to get modern education but without forgetting or injuring their ancient cultural heritage. He reminded them very strongly that it lay with them, the mothers to bring up the coming generations on sane and healthy lines. It was when the Swamiji was in Trivandrum giving a definite shape to his programme of giving practical training to his devotees and disciples in Travancore area that he got the unexpected news that Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj, his beloved gurubhai and Secretary of the Mission, was critically ill. At once he started for Calcutta.





SPREADING THE MESSAGE AFAR

nmindful of the big boil and swelling in his leg and the severe pain on account of them, the Swamiji reached Madras at the end of nearly a day's wearisome train journey. At the conversation class held in the morning of the 14th of August 1927, he spoke to the inmates of the Students' Home on bhakti which he described as pure love for God and loving service to His children. He left for Calcutta the same evening taking the Bombay route, as traffic on the normal route was disrupted owing to breaches caused by floods. It took him six days to reach Calcutta. Though travel - weary, he went straight to the room in the Udbodhan Office where "his beloved gurubhai, a heroic Jnanin and Karmayogin was lying on his death-bed awaiting the arrival of his dear Tulasi, like Bheeshma lying on his bed of arrows waiting for Uttarayana". 1

The Swamiji went near his gurubhai and spoke to him that his Tulasi

was standing before him. Hearing Tulasi's voice, Swami Saradanandaji slowly opened his eyes and saw his gurubhai. Both shed tears, tears such as angels weep! Who can say what their tear-dimmed eyes and quivering lips communicated with each other? Swami Saradanandaji's eyes closed again; a gentle smile played on his lips even as his face was lit up with a serenity of indefinable dignity and charm. The solemn chanting of Hari Om Ramakrishna announced to the world that the herosoul, Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj had entered mahasamadhi.

His passing away made 'a deep void' and 'a deep cut' in the heart of the Swamiji. He was awakened to the shocking, heart-rending realisation that a number of his intimate gurubhais, one after another, had left him severely alone in this world - Swamis Vivekananda. Brahmananda, Ramakrishanananda, Tureeyananda, Premananda etc., and now, Swami Saradananda. He felt it much like the proverbial last straw that all but broke his back, overburdened with the task of spreading the message of his Master. However, he decided to continue the work that lay unfinished before him with absolute submission to the will of Sri Guru Maharaj because he had vowed to himself that he would obey his Master's command unflinchingly, unquestioningly to his last breath.

Accordingly, the Swamiji set out on a three-month - long tour of the U.P., Bihar, East Bengal and Assam besides the many centres in and around Calcutta and a few neighbouring towns. These extensive travels affected his health very badly; yet he stuck to his decision of visiting Burma in December 1927. During this first visit, he included such important centres as Rangoon, Mandalay and Akyab. The public welcome given to the Swamiji by the citizens of Rangoon was as magnificent as it was spontaneous. It reflected their admiration for your loyal and sincere devotion to the great Cause, namely, the uplift of the millions of people in the East and West'2 In honour of the Swamiji 's visit, the Government of Burma made over a grand building, and the Corporation of Rangoon donated Rs.25,000/- for the Ramakrishana Mission hospital. Similarly, the Swamiji was given a rousing reception in Mandalay, where a large number of people, impressed by his inspiring lectures, became staunch supporters of the Ramakrishna Mission in Burma.

The citizens of Akyab gave the Swamiji a warm reception and

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 151.

presented him with a Welcome Address. It spoke of their rare privilege and good fortune to meet one of the direct disciples of the worldrenowned Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa and an eminent and distinguished colleague of the illustrious Swami Vivekananda'3. His reply to the Address was so full of Sri Guru Maharai's spirit of the 'harmony of religions' and of Swami Vivekananda's message of 'work as worship' that several sincere souls coming under its hypnotic spell became his life-long devotees. Many were fortunate to become his disciples.

Returning from Burma, the Swamiji stayed in the Benares Seva ashrama for nearly four months, training the young inmates, teaching them the many Vedantic texts and holding conversation classes for the benefit also of the large number of devotees who visited the ashrama everyday to meet and listen to the Swamiji. Among them was a devotee from Kerala to whom the Swamiji said " Kerala is a fine place. Return soon and work among the people there. You must meet me when I visit Kerala next time. My soul is there. I thirst to return to Kerala. That is my place"4 How very prophetic! Simple words of advice, but how vibrant with genuine love and concern for the people of Kerala! He returned to the South, breaking the journey in Bombay and staying with his devotees there for a few days before reaching Bangalore on the 19th of May 1928.

Soon, he left for Ponnampet to preside over Bhagavan's birthday celebrations which Swami Shambavananda and the other inmates of the ashrama managed to make a memorable religious festival of Coorg. Returning to Bangalore, he stayed there for three months looking after the steadily improving activities of the ashrama. Then in August, he paid a flying visit to the Trivandrum ashrama where he gave sanyasa to five bramacharins. On his return to Bangalore, he gave sanyasa to four more bramacharins in September. On the 14th of November 1928, the Swamiji visited Salem to open the ashrama there. From Salem, he went on a short visit to a few centres in Malabar.

During his stay in his favourite ashrama at Ottapalam, he visited an inaccessible interior village called Tolanur, a dozen miles away from Ottapalam. The purpose of his visit was to perform the renovation ceremony of the local temple dedicated to the worship of Skanda and Sastha. It was owned by the Ezhava community which was hard put to get the ceremony performed by the Orthodox Vedic brahmins (Tantris).In

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, page 153

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 154.

his short speech made after performing the ceremony, the Swamili described Skanda and Sastha as the two deities of Kerala whose worship would ensure both the material prosperity and spiritual welfare of the people. The people of Tolanur presented to him a Welcome Address in Sanskrit. Replying to it, the Swamiji spoke of the life and teachings of the yugavatara Sri Ramakrishna, the fulfilment of all the religions of the world.

From Ottapalam, the Swamiji went to Calicut at the invitation of the Vedanta Society there. At its meeting held on the 25th of November 1928, he was given a Welcome Address to which he replied suitably. But it was at the conversation class attended by the educated elite of the town that he proved his class as a world teacher of religion and philosophy .On his return to Bangalore, he received an invitation for a second visit to Burma. Since his last visit to Rangoon, the Mission hospital had made rapid progress and the Women's Ward was to be opened by the Governor of Burma. The Swamiji welcomed the Governor and thanked him for the interest he had been showing in the service activities of the Mission. Visiting also the other important centres in Burma and giving initiation to a few devotees in each of these centres. the Swamiji returned to Calcutta in January 1929.

Soon, the Swamiji left Calcutta on an extensive tour of Bengal and Bihar. Continuous travels and exacting work for long hours over many years took a heavy toll of his health. While he was staying as the guest of Prof. Nandipati Mukerji in Patna, he had a serious attack of pneumonia compounded with diabetes and a persistent dry cough. The best available treatement had no effect on him and he was growing weaker with every passing day. In spite of the doctors' objections, the Swamiji insisted on his being taken to Calcutta and put under the treatement of his old physician, Dr.D.P. Ghosh. His condition began to show signs of slow but definite improvement and by the middle of March 1929, he was his normal, healthy self again. Soon, he returned to Bangalore via Bombay where he stayed with his devotees for a few days.





· (8) · Sand Barrier , 97 September 2007

FROM BANGALORE TO OTTAPALAM

owever, the Swamiji could not be kept confined to the Bangalore ashrama for long as a great deal more of work remained to be done in Kerala and elsewhere. In fact, the five or six years between 1930 and '35 formed the penultimate period in the life of the Swamiji, the great *Karma-Yogin*. It was also the most strenuous, considering his advancing years and deteriorating health. In fact, he was burning himself out like a candle, shedding brilliant light all around, in the process. Unmindful of his poor health, he set out on a tour of Kerala staying at each centre for a few days. In April 1930 alone, he opened three

ashramas and between 1930 and '35 five more were opened in Kerala. During this period, he also visited the North and spread Sri Guru Maharaj's message in the U.P., Bihar, East Bengal and Assam, spending a couple of months each year for the purpose. In 1933, the Swamiji visited Burma for the third and final time – to preside over the Hindu conference in Rangoon. His address was as much a masterly oration as 'a well-thought-out, clear and comprehensive survey of the ways and means for the regeneration of the Hindu Society besides the expression of wisdom in the logical application of *Sanatana Dharma* (eternal

principles) to modern social conditions.'1

Thirty years of hard and unremitting labour made the Swamiji the most effective, articulate and prominent disciple of Sri Ramakrishana in apreading. His message throughout India. The significance of Swami Ramakrishanandaji's words that the Swamiji was recalled in 1906 from America for more urgent work at home, `for the regeneration of his own motherland' was seen fully realised now, some two decades after those prophetic words were written. The Swamiji was the heart and soul of the eighteen ashramas he had established in the South. He was also persuaded to accept the Presidentship of two sister organisations in Calcutta-the Ramakrishana Sarada Math and the Vivekananda Mission.

Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj was indeed a spiritual Bhageeratha who brought the Ganges of Sri Ramkrishana's message from the heaven of Dakshineswar and made it flow through the plains of the motherland, both in the north and in the south of the Vindhyas. The Swamiji was like the great Sikh *guru*, Guru Gobind Singh, who, like a 'wounded lion', came to the South only to prepare the ground for the last scene of his life's drama. He left the Bangalore ashrama in June 1935 with the words befitting a great *Karma Yogin* of lofty detachment and a simple child of Sri Ramakrishana – 'I have my begging bowl'!.² The Swamiji went to the ashrama in Trivandrum where he stayed for about two weeks and gave *sanyasa* to the sixth and final batch of five *brahmacharins*. Before long he left for Calcutta via Bombay for a month-long tour of Bengal. He returned to Calcutta only to fall ill with a serious disease.

Dr. D.P. Ghosh, the Swamiji's old physician and devotee was called in. Many ardent devotees like Kiran Chandra Dutt and members of his family were in constant attendance on him. But the illness only grew worse day by day and so eminent doctors like Dr. B.C. Roy and Dr. Nilratan Sircar were consulted. Their unanimous verdict was that the illness was fatal and that the patient's condition was becoming critical, hopeless. As advised by them, the senior swami attending on him wired to all the ashramas in the South as also to a few important centres in the North and in Burma. But the Swamiji called the faithful, old doctor to his bedside and whispered to him in a feeble, almost inaudible voice:

"Don't be anxious. I tell you, I am not going to die now. There is some more work of Sri Guru Maharaj to be done and I must live to finish it.... I am a poor *sadhu*. I shall take your medicines only. Give me whatever you think best" ³. But the Swamiji's disciples and devotees, alarmed at

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 158

^{2.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 159

^{3.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 160.

the news they had received about his illness, began to arrive in numbers to have what they thought to be their last *darshan* of their *guru*. Seeing them for no reason that he could think of, the Swamiji appeared very much upset and annoyed. He took the disciple - swamis to task for deserting their posts of duty without getting his permission. They said that the news conveyed by the telegram was such that all that they could do was to hurry to Calcutta. Then he shouted at the senior swami-incharge who wired to them and put them to such a deal of trouble. He, in his turn, said that he did so as advised by the doctors who attended on the Swamiji. "So you and your doctors", said the Swamiji, "had settled between yourselves that I should die now! No, no...,"4 he went on in this way as if he was enjoying perfect health!

But at heart, the Swamiji was pleased to meet them and he let them stay there and serve him for a few days. He graciously told his disciples, "I see that you were not at fault. You need not go back just now." What was seen as remarkable in the Swamiji during their stay with them was that he personally gave direction for providing his disciples with hot water for bathing, food and dishes to their taste, warm clothes, mosquito nets at night and so on. What wonderful hospitality! And what heartwarming, unfathomable love for his children when he was himself suffering from illness! When some of the disciples asked Dr.Ghosh about the nature of the illness and the chances of the Swamiji's recovery, he answered:

"All medical men have pronounced it as hopeless. But the Swami says he is not going to die now. Who can say anything about these supermen? They form a class of their own. When he talks forcibly, I am reminded of the Swami Vivekanada. He resembles the great Swami in many respects..." ⁶ Gradually, the Swamiji's condition began to improve to such an extent that the doctors pronounced him clearly out of danger. He wanted to go to Kerala at once for re-couping his health. The doctors advised him to take rest for some more days before going to Madras on a steamer instead of travelling by train. But within a couple of days, the Swamiji was already on a train to Trivandrum where he spent about five restful months. Then he left for his favourite Niranjan ashrama, Ottapalam where he reached on the 31st of May 1936. Thereafter, till his Mahasamadhi in April 1938, this came to be his spiritual Head Quarters as Bangalore was till June 1935.

^{4.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 61 5 and 6 I bid, Page 162



MASTERY AND MERCY

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he two years from 1936 to 1938 which the Swamiji spent in the Niranjan ashrama, Ottapalam might be discribed as his valedictory years or the years of his 'active-retired' life. He made use of that period of time for the uplift of the people around the ashrama, mostly poor and ignorant villagers leading an insular life and hardly aware of a vast and fastchanging modern world outside. A somewhat rich and influential section of the people who inhabited the village was a group of Nambudiri (brahmin) settlers and their families. They were, no doubt, orthodox and exclusive but were themselves the victims of a more vicious orthodoxy called smaartha vichaara, a cruel and senseless practice, far more heartless than the practice of caste prejudice like untouchability firmly entrenched in Kerala. Driven out of their hearths and homes, they had lost all self-confidence, self-respect and manly dignity. One significant aspect of the Swamiji's mission during this period was to raise them by giving back to them, their lost self-esteem and individuality. This, he did by his personality and presence, by precept and practice. The better method he adopted was to infuse his spirit of love into the children

belonging to these families. He was their parent and playmate, carefully planning to bring about their all - sided development from physical fitness to spiritual awakenment.

The equally important other aspect of his mission was to teach and train his elderly disciples and the inmates of the ashramas who had taken refuge in him. They were to be cast in the mould of the true and perfect servants of Sri Ramakrishna. In this, his methods were often harsh and severe. In dealing with his disciples, in correcting any work done by them in a clumsy or careless manner, be it cooking or gardening, singing a bhajan - song or worshipping in the shrine, he appeared to be a dreaded task-master. The Swamiji would freely pardon any human error honestly owned up. But if the disciple were to conceal the truth or justify his misconduct, then woe unto him!, the Swamiji was sure to trample his evil ego underfoot and leave it crushed and bleeding by the wayside. But even here, the Swamiji's loving concern was for the absorption of the character-making, life - giving message by the disciple so that he would become a worthy instrument in the hands of Sri Gurumaharaj. It had the love of the parent in punishing the child, the healing compassion behind the surgeon's scalpel.

The Swamiji saw that illiteracy among the children of the poor villagers was the one problem crying for urgent solution. Therefore, he opened the Niranjan Vidyalaya for boys and the Sarada Vidyalaya for girls in the ashrama compound itself. From his rich devotees in Bombay,he brought books, slates, pencils as also clothes for the poor students. Many of them were given free board in the ashrama itself. Students belonging to all castes along with their parents were encouraged to interdine in the ashrama hall on days when rich devotees arranged for special pooja and feasts. The Swamiji made arrangements for a gymnasium with horizontal and parallel bars for each school and he himself used to train the children in doing the various exercises. He also taught them bhajan-songs and held meditation classes for them every evening. Those children who had their homes near the ashrama spent most of their free time with the Swamiji, much like the students of the old gurukala days living with the venerable old sage, the kulapati as his children in his hermitage.

For the benefit of the unlettered, the Swamiji had portions of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna rendered into Malayalam and had them performed as *katha-kalakshepam* twice an year. He took particular care in bringing the liberal ideas of Ramakrishna - Vivekananda to the doors of the Nambudiri women-folk confined to their homes and enslaved by outworn habits and customs. Silently and unknown to

themselves, they were made the children of Sri Ramakrishna. And once they became members of that great and growing family, they left behined their old diffidence and began to regain the dignity and honour due to them in society. The Swamiji encouraged them to go on pilgrimage to Kanyakumari and in the process to many other temples and holy places. The more fruitful outcome of the pilgrimage was their visits to the other Ramakrishna ashramas on the way and their contacts with several other devotees and disciples of the Swamiji in Kerala. This helped them in breaking out of the prison-house of isolation and developing in them the sense of belonging to a freer and larger life. In this, the Swamiji himself had shown the way by taking a large party of devotees to Kanyakumari and staying in a few ashramas on the way. The result was the forging of a bond of loving relationship with the Swamiji's devotees throughout Kerala, a bond that was far stronger and more lasting than any family tie.

In moulding the brahmacharins and sanyasins into men of character, fearlessness and efficiency, the Swamiji's methods were anything but gentle. He had little patience with those who were listless, half-hearted or hypocritical. The disciples mistakenly thought that to be absentminded or non-observant was not a defect in the worldly-unwise sanyasins. At one such disciple, the Swamiji stormed, "I wonder how you will practise meditation if you are incapable of observing things before your very eyes. Meditation requires the keenest perception and an extremely alert mind..... Such silly matters are unworthy of a Paramahamsa, you might think!...1". At another disciple who was trying to find out excuses in defence of a more or less similar offence, the Swamiji thundered, "I had the good fortune to see and serve a greater Paramahamsa than any of you. He was immersed in God and yet he used to take us to task for negligence or carelessness in matters however small. Non- attachment does not mean carelessness, indifference or half-heartedness in work. That is your notion of the sanyasa spirit!... Even at this advanced age, I can walk away to the Himalayas with kamandalu in hand, as I used to do in my youth. I do not want anyone to attend on me. Yet, I suffer all sorts of worries and difficulties for your sake to make you better men. And you people feel hurt at my pointing out your defects and raise your hood...2"

What the Swamiji wanted his disciples to acquire above everything else was faith in Sri Gurumaharaj as also the conviction that service done in His name was tapasya. When one of his disciples expressed his fears that, without a personality like the Swamiji, the future of the ashramas

^{1.} Swamy Nirmalananda, page 168

^{2.} Ibid, pages. 168 · 169 · condensed

would be bleak, lightning flashed from his eyes followed by words of thunder, "Personality! Indeed, you depend on a personality! Have you faith in Sri Gurumaharaj? This is the mistake with you; you have no faith in Him. Don't you see the various Christian organisations working? Christ is the personality, the power behined them; He is the cause in whom they have faith. If you also have that faith in the power behind you, if you surrender yourself at His feet, success and other things are sure to follow."³

When Swami Vishadananda, one of his disciples, returned from the North after a period of penance and pilgrimage, Swamiji told him, "Devoted service to Sri Gurumaharaj is *tapasya*. What we gained by pilgrimages and *tapasya*, Sashi Maharaj attained by his constant devoted service (to Sri Guru Maharaj)... With plenty of money in the pocket even the Maharaja of Mysore can go and live in the Himalayas. That will not be *tapasya*. Depending on friends is not surrendering yourself to God. God is the source of everything. Surrender yourself to Him and then practise *tapasya*...Renouncing the lower, little self, you become identified with the supreme Self. That is *yoga* and *yoga* is dexterity in action. Be dextrous in action, no matter what the action is"4. It is to be pointed out here that the disciple had evidently absorbed the Swamiji's wholesome advice, for he remained in the Niranjan ashrama serving Sri Guru Maharaj for the rest of his life.

Trained under the observant eyes of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, the Swamiji had learnt to do all work with the mark of excellence and perfection stamped on them. He wanted his disciples also to work in this way . Once, he was making two of the disciples, Swamis Muraharananda and Ramananda sweat and labour in carpentry, masonry and painting in the hall of the adjacent Shiva temple.Sri Chengappa, a householder disciple of the Swamiji from Coorg who was watching this began to wonder why the Swamiji was forcing the Swamis to do such hard labour. As if reading his thought, the Swamiji told him "You know, every art must reach its perfecion in a monastery. In Rome, even brewery reached its perfection. The best wine was made there. That wine is there for sale even now; it is priced very high. Perfection in every useful art must be reached here . That is why I am making these young Swamis do carpentry, masonry, painting and other works. 5 This amply illustrates that beneath his hard exterior there slept a heart which beat for the all-round perfection of his dicsiples. Any further comment on it is both uncalled for and superfluous.

^{3.} Swamy Nirmalananda, page 170

^{4.} Ibid, Page 172, Condensed



THE END OF HIS EARTHLY SOJOURN

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hile lying seriously ill in Calcutta in 1935, the Swamiji whispered into the ears of his long-time devotee and trusted physician, Dr. D.P. Ghosh that there was 'some more work of Sri Gurumaharaj to be done' and that he 'must live to finish it'. However, there was very little organisational work left uncompleted by the close of 1937, that is, about an year after he had chosen to stay at the Niranjan ashrama, Ottapalam. As President of the Ramakrishna Sarada Math and Vivekananda Mission in Calcutta, he had already given general directions regarding their work. Early in 1937, he visited Calicut twice in connection with the activities of the local Vedanta Society blessed by him. When it was gifted to the Swamiji, he deputed Swami Sekharananda to run a medical aid centre there. It was progressing well side by side with worship, bhajan and meditation in the shrine room. The Swamiji thought it wise to turn the Society into an ashrama proper. And so was born the Ramakrishna Seva

ashrama, Calicut in 1937, the last of the eighteen ashramas he had founded in the South in the course of a quarter century.

Finding that there was no secular body for organised philanthropic activities, the Swamiji brought into being the Narendra Mission, a householders' organisation for social service with a religious spirit, named after Swami Vivekananda, the patriot-saint of India. The Swamiji was able to draw up a committee of rich and influential people like Principal A.V. Kuttikrishna Menon, Sub-judge T.V. Krishnan Nair, Seth Nagji Purushothamji and others with the Zamorin Raja as its Patron and President. He left it to the goodwill of the committee to carry on the activities of the Mission in the truly religious spirit of work as worship. As the Spiriutual Head of all the ashramas in Kerala, he executed a Deed of Trust making all the ashramas autonomous in administrative and financial matters based on the principle of `decentralisation and coordination'.

Meanwhile, the many devotees of Bombay and Salem were praying to the Swamiji to bless them with his presence in their midst for a few days. He granted them their prayers with a flying visit to each centre. Returning, he found time to take a large party of devotees including most of his little children to Kanyakumari as part of his programme of 'spiritual picnic'. When the Swamiji returned to Ottapalam in December 1937, he was a tired man; but he returned with the glow of satisfaction as he felt sure that he had the whole of Sri Guru Maharaj's work well and truly done.

We have already seen that the Swamiji was more than a father to his little children whom he fondled and amused, with whom he joked, laughed and played as only he could. But at the same time, he looked upon even these little children as the living embodiments of the Divine Mother. Outwardly, he was the spiritual teacher and guardian showering his grace on all and blessing even little children below the age of twelve with initiation, unasked! But deep down within himself was the real Swamiji who was profoundly anchored to his own serene Self. And the whole world outside including the devotees, the disciples and the little children was just the projection of his Self, the *Virat*, the worshipful Mother of the Universe. That was why he picked up a five-year-old girl,* placed her on a high stool and asked the grown-ups to worship the Mother of the Universe sitting on Her throne! It was not one of his many

^{*} She was Chandramani who later became an inmate of the Sarada ashrama as Swami Bodhananda.

usual jokes, for he fell prostrate before her when all those present there on that occasion followed suit.

Obviously for the same reason, the Swamiji performed the Kumari Pooja at which he worshipped twenty girls observing all the rules of the rituals. Nine of them were fortunate to serve him throughout his illness and four of them - Bhuvaneswari, Sarada, Sushila and Sarojini - as well as Chandramani later became sanyasins in the Sarada ashrama when it was started as a sister institution of the Niranjan ashrama during the centenary of the Holy Mother.

However, there was no indication that the Swamiji was withdrawing more and more unto himself. Outwardly, his life was as active as it ever was. Occasionally, he used to speak nostalgically of the good old days he had spent with Sri Guru Maharaj and how his gurubhais had left the world and left him alone. It seemed that he was longing to join them in 'the supreme abode of Vishnu', quickly ringing down the curtain on the human drama. Even some of the more obvious hints about his readiness to give up the body could not somehow be taken in that sense. For example, he had spoken to his sanyasin disciples on different occasions in this vein: 'I shall depart shortly and then you will all be free'; 'Who will look after these children of mine when I am gone?' I have made myself ready to start. Now tell me what I should do with these ashramas. I have no more connections with them.....and let me lie down peacefully' etc. Other remarks made by him were, 'I may give up this body shortly, at any time - who knows!', to the editor of Vivekavani and Who will give you Shambhu Chutney when I go away?' to the children attending on him.1

The Swamiji had not been feeling very well lately and the accidental death of Theyyan, a young servant of the ashrama affected him deeply. Soon after it, he fell ill with high fever and constipation. On the 21st of April 1938, a doctor was called in and with a quinine injection and purgative, there was a slight relief in his condition. But on the 23rd, there was seen some swelling on his left upper arm as also on his feet. But to the surprise of all, the Swamiji instructed the swami attending on him thus: "Don't give me any more medicine. I do not want any thing from tomorrow onwards. Let me lie down peacefully. "2 On the 24th night the Swamiji was heard to say 'Some one will have to go back tomorrow'3. News reached the ashrama that Swami Vijananandaji Maharaj passed

^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 182

^{2 &}amp; 3. Ibid, Page 184

away on the 25th April.From the 24th night onwards, the Swamiji was heard chanting 'Ma-Ma-oh!-Ma!'.

Seeing no improvement in his condition on the 24th April, the disciples wired to Dr. Tampi who reached the ashrama on the 25th night and examined the Swamiji immediately when everything was found normal. After a quiet night, the Swamiji woke up at 4 o' clock in the morning of the 26th April 1938 when the auspicious Harivasara had begun. But when Dr. Tampi examined the Swamiji at about 7 A.M., he was alarmed to find that the great spiritual master was passing through the last minutes of his life in this world. While the children were singing bhajan songs , the Swamiji was seen trying to get up on the bed. Swami Muraharananda gently raised and rested the body of his guru on his chest. In feeble tones, the Swamiji said, 'yes, yes; that's all right'- the last words that escaped from his eloquent mouth which used to keep large and enlightened audiences thrilled and spell - bound. After a while, he was gently laid on the bed when a deep peace overspead his solemn face. The holy Ganga-theertham was given to the Swamiji and as the children sang the last line of the hymn, Nirmalam hridayam yasya..... the life-breath that throbbed within for seventy-five summers quietly left that wondrous instrument of Sree Gurumaharaj. The anguished chorus that rose from the assembled devotees and disciples announced the mahasamadhi of Tulasi Maharaj, Swami Nirmalanandaji:

''Jai Sri Sad Guru Maharaj ki Jai Jai Sri Swamiji Maharaj ki Jai''

As the news of the Swamiji's mahasamadhi spread, crowds of devotees in hushed mourning began to pour into the ashrama. Even nature put on a sad face and wept a mournful drizzle. By about three in the afternoon, the Harivasara was over when the Swamiji's body was bathed, dressed in ochre silk and decorated with garlands and flowers. After arati, the devotees and disciples present there offered their last worship and pranam at the lotus feet of their guru and God. Meanwhile, the funeral pyre with sandal wood, camphor, ghee etc., was being got ready on the banks of the holy Bharata river. The body of the Swamiji was taken there in a bhajan - procession led by a group of senior sanyasin and householder disciples. The pyre was lit amid the chanting of hymns and the sacred names of God: 'Jai Jai Ramakrishna, Jai Jai Swamiji' sounded more like a lamentation, stifled in the throats of the devotees.

The sunset that evening plunged not only the place but also the thousands of the Swamiji's devotees and disciples throughout the

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country in great darkness, sorrow and gloom. On the 7th day, his mortal remains, the sacred ashes, were collected and kept in an urn in the ashrama with due ceremonial worship. On the 13th day, the samaradhana was conducted in the ashrama and about 2000 Daridra Narayanas sumptuously fed. The ashrama which used to wear a festive look during the Swamiji's residence now looked all but deserted. The devotees felt that the light of joy which hitherto had brightened the days had gone out of their lives.



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A PEEP INTO HIS PERSONALITY

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arder than a diamond and softer than a flower are the minds of supermen. Whoever can hope to know their strange and inscrutable nature?', asks an ancient Sanskrit poet. The Bhagavad-Gita descibes the Self, and by implication also the self-realised hero, as a wondrous mystery ever remaining as an incomprehensible enigma even after one sees and hears and speaks a great deal about It. Our familiarity with such a hero-soul is highly misleading, indeed a hindrance, in trying to assess his personality. Did not the Yadavas look upon Sri Krishna as one among them? The faculty of our understanding is, no doubt, pitifully inadequate and imperfect; however, it is when we try to articulate what we have understood about a great man that we begin to look laughable and pathetic like the dumb trying to describe the sweetness of the sugar he has eaten. This is exactly the case when we try to get a glimpse of the personality of a spiritual master like Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj. Yet to a disciple of his, nothing is more natural than singing the glories of the guru and getting an overflowing sense of fulfilment from it.

The Swamiji was an antaranga, though not an Iswarakoti disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He was a perfect, liberated being who chose not to merge with Brahman, the supreme Divinity. Instead he retained a little saatwik ego so that he could enjoy the sweetness of Divinity by becoming a Leela-sahachara, a companion of the Lord in His human sport. About such perfected souls, in particular about his own gurubhais, Swami Vivekananda observes: "... the perfected sages of the previous kalpa (cycle of time) take human bodies and come on earth with avataras. They are the associates of the Lord. God works through them and propagates His religion... Know each of these who are here of great spiritual power.Because they remain shrivelled before me, do not think of them as ordinary souls. When they go out, they will be the cause of the awakenment of spirituality in the people. Know them to be part of the spiritual body of Sri Ramakrishna who was the embodiment of infinite religious ideas. I look upon them with that eye... They are, each one of them, a centre of religious power and in time that power will manifest itself...1" Seeing the Swamiji through the eyes of his illustrious gurubhai has this advantage that it explains the otherwise unaccountable and amazing enchantment that the Swamiji has laid on the hearts of his innumerable devotees and disciples.

Once or twice in 1937, when he was in a nostalgic mood, the Swamiji had described himself as 'Sri Ramakrishna's Kakabhusundi' (Kakabhusundi is the oldest devotee of Sri Rama mentioned in the Yoga-Vasishta). Among Sri Guru Maharaj's disciples, the Swamiji had lived for the longest period spreading His message for thirty-five years, from 1903 to 1938. Similarly, it was the Swamiji alone among his gurubhais who had taken the message to the largest number and to the farthest corners of India and even beyond her frontiers - to America and Burma. No gurubhai of his could match his achievement in building up the organisation. Besides improving the status and usefulness of the Bangalore ashrama beyond recognition, he succeeded in establishing eighteen ashramas in the South in the course of a quarter of a century from 1913 to 1937. Drawn by his magnetic personality, scores of young men gave up their all and followed him to take up Bhagavan's work which astonished even the Presindent of the Mission, Swami Brahmanandaji Maharai.

^{1.} Complete Works; Vol VII, page 256 and 259; Quoted from Swmai Nirmalananda, Pages. 188 - 189)

This amazing organisational achievement of the Swamiji bears emphatic restatement. Before his first visit to Kerala in 1911, there was no Ramakrishna ashrama, no 'mission' work , and no brahmachari or sanyasi of the Ramakrishna Order. There was no systematic religious study or sadhana even in Trivandrum where Swami Ramakrishnanandaji Maharaj himself had conducted regular religious classes for over a month under the auspices of the local Vedanta Society. But within two years of Tulasi Maharaj's visit to Travancore, two ashramas - one at Haripad and the other at Tiruvalla - were opened and consecrated to the worship of Sri Ramakrishna . A dozen young men including 'Bhakta' Neelakanta who became famous in later years as Swami Purushottamananda of Vasishtaguha became active workers dedicated to the Cause. By the end of 1937, a few months before his mahasamadhi when he retired from active, orgnisational work, he had thirty-four sanyasin disciples and as many brahmacharins working in the eighteen ashramas he had founded in the South, many of them in remote, inaccessible villages. Innumerable were his householder disciples and devotees, many of them clusterd around each ashrama, with the result that they formed a circle of supporters of the ashramas in all possible ways.

Prabuddha - Keralam, the monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam, was founded by the Swamiji on the Vijayadasami day in 1915. It is the only religious monthly in Kerala which continues its publication even to the present day for an unbroken period of eighty eventful years. The seniormost among the Swamis from Kerala who had rendered signal service to the Mission like the Swami Siddheswarananda, Tapasyananda, Vimalananda, Agamananda and others were young High school or College students when Swami Nirmalanadaji Maharaj was making his annual visits to Kerala. Their joining the Mission had not a little to do with the pervasive influence of the Swamiji's spiritaul personality. Again it is admitted on all hands that Kerala, after Bengal, has been the one state where the Ramakrishna movement has taken deep roots. It is in this tiny state in the Southernmost part of India that the Mission activities have been most fruitful in terms of the number of institutions, of brahmacharins and sanyasins as well as in absorbing the message by the people in its true spirit. Now, this did not happen somewhow, by a lucky accident, as it were. It was definitely caused, the result and evidence of careful planning and dedicated work over a long period. The inspiration for such a satisfactory state of affairs can be traced to Swami Nirmalanandaji

Maharaj — his clear vision and self-effacing work for well over a quarter of a century.

Swami Vivekananda living under the same roof with the American families, the discerning American devotees say, was proof of the possibility of the messenger of God, Jesus Christ, the embodiment of purity, love, service and renunciation living among men as a historical character and not as the brain-child of an imaginative theologian. Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj's life among the devotees was to make them believe that a child-like, God-intoxiated man, Sri Ramakrishna Deva had really lived among men and divinised Dakshineswar and its neighbourhood. Similarly, Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj's life among us was to make us believe that the majestic monk, the leonine Vedantic world-teacher, Swami Vivekananda had lived here and awakened the people of the world with his man-making, life-giving message. To see the Swamiji and to hear him was to have faith in Ramakrishna-Vivekananda and the Religion Eternal they have revalidated.

Those who had known both Swami Vivekananda and Swami Nirmalananda at close quarters speak of the striking similarity between the two in several respects. The majesty, the manly fearlessness, an uncompromising adherence to lofty ideals, practical efficiency, conversational brilliance — all these and more are shared by both the Swamis. the one in the largest measure and the other on a smaller scale. Both of them reflected and represented the spirit of their Great Master in different ways to suit their apparently different goals. Sri Ramakrishna awakened the whole world to a new spiritual awareness with the Vedantic lion - roar of Swami Vivekananda. The same Sri Ramakrishana awakened South India, Kerala in particular, steeped in superstition, orthodoxy and casteism, by blowing the conch of Swami Nirmalananda. Both the Swamis had the serious exterior of a Jnanin and Karma-yogin; but within their bosom was the powerful undercurrent of bhakti which, in spite of the best defences, had revealed itself on a few, rare occasions. The awesome aspect of a spiritual master unmistakably evident in both would drop off and dissolve itself into pure compassion before sincere seekers thirsting for their grace and bleesings. To such pure souls, the Swamiji was all sweetness and sympathy, their unfailing solace and ultimate refuge.

The Swamiji was the spiritual guide and guru to his devotees and disciples; to his little children, he was their playmate and guardian; to

his *gurubhais*, he was their well-beloved. But to himself, he was the child of Sri Ramakrishna, His servant and a mere instrument in His hands. He looked upon his whole life as a long and continuous worship of his Master, one of total dedication to His will. His life was an extended exercise in supreme detachment to all that was rightly his due—fame, influence, adoration of the people and so on which he did everything to spurn as if he was eager to court unpopularity. The Swamiji stood in need of nothing from anyone, for his was a life of self-fulfilment, joy and peace. No one worked with half his intensity and thoroughness; yet, he stood loftily aside, untouched by the stresses and strains of incessant, feverish activity. The Swamiji was the living exemplar of the spirit of the *Bhagavad-Gita* – philanthropic efficiency with philosophic calm.

Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj was a religious teacher, first and last. The ashramas he established were centres of religion and spirituality. Every word and deed of his was from the standpoint of Vedanta. Yet his life and message had their tremendous impact on social life and inter-human relationship. *Daridra-Narayana - pooja* or poor-feeding was an integral part of the ashrama activities. So also was flood - famine - epidemic relief work. But these were not poverty alleviation programme or the modern hobby of social service. They were work done in the spirit of worship to the God in man, purifying and elevating both the giver and the receiver.

Of infinitely more far reaching consequence was his silent but effective crusade against caste prejudice and orthodoxy for which there was absolutely no scriptural sanction. However, the crusade was not a negative or protestant programme aimed against any one particular community. It was an instance of the Swamiji quietly putting into practice in his ashramas the Vedantic principle of same-sightedness, of the inherence of God in every (human) being, born rich or poor, in this higher caste or that lower caste. This was the experiment he successfully made in Haripad in 1913, to start with, and then extended to every ashrama in Kerala. Religious teachers in Kerala like Sri Chattambi Swamigal and Sri Narayana Guru also had made similar experiments. But their points of departure from the Swamiji's are more significant than those of similiarity.

The Swamiji, acted on the principle that all those who went to the ashrama belonged to one caste — the devotees of God! All of them sat together in the ashrama to partake of Bhagavan's prasad and all of them

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were free to go right up to the shrine and bow down before God this side of the threshold. This was practised so generously and accepted so naturally in the ashrama that caste prejudice came to be wiped away from the minds of the Swamiji's devotees. It was even felt that to entertain the idea of caste distinction anywhere, under any condition, was to be unworthy of a devotee of the Swamiji. To cap it all, as it were, the brahmacharins and the sanyasins of the ashramas were drawn from all castes, from the 'untouchable' pulayas to the most aristocratic brahmins. This was the practice followed in all the Sri Ramakrishna ashramas from the very beginning more than eighty years ago and decades before the Harijan movement of Mahatma Gandhi and the Vaikom and Guruvayur satyagrahas under his leadership. The Swamiji's successful experiments in the ashramas in Kerala had anticipated and, in fact, paved the way for the historic Temple Entry proclamation by the Maharaia of Travancore in 1936.

Spiritual masters like Buddha and Christ, Sree Sankara and Swami Vivekananda belong to the whole world. The Swamiji himself had repeatedly stated in his lectures and conversations that Sri Ramakrishna, like the uncle moon, belonged to the whole world and that only the small minded and the ignorant would claim Him as Bengal's or India's. Similarly, it can be said that the Swamiji belonged to the whole of India though his main field of activity was South India. Till 1909, the Swamiji was unknown in the South; the North was his area of work. Between 1910 and 1924,he had visited and toured the many centres in the North several times. From 1924 to 1935, he had extensive travels in Bengal, Bihar, U.P. and Assam every year. During this period, he had paid three visits also to Burma spreading the message of Sri Gurumaharaj in that country.

Yet, at the risk of being accused as small - minded and fanatical, Kerala claims Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj as its own, for no religious teacher, Keralite or non-Keralite, has done half as much as the Swamiji in spiritually awakening us from a mockery of religion, religion misunderstood as so much of ritualism, a lot of do-s and don't-s and so on . The Swamiji was unfamiliar with the language of the people, their customs and manners. He had to suffer all sorts of personal discomforts and inconveniences. Often, he had to travel by carts and country - boats and make it even on foot in order to reach out to the people in remote villages. And all this overwork when he was growing old and not enjoying good

health. A good forty years before the birth of Kerala as a State, he welded the Travancore-Cochin-Malabar areas into one unit and made us members of the family of his devotees. What was more, he made the devotees here, shut up in some rural corner in Kerala feel a sense of belonging to a very large Ramakrishna brotherhood spread throughout India. It was an act of liberation, freeing us from narrow, insular ways of thinking and feeling and introducing us into the pattern of a wonderful unity in a wonderful diversity.

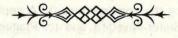
It was Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj who had made Sri Ramakrishna a household name in Kerala. He made hundreds of hearts and homes in Kerala the temple of Sri Ramakrishna. The Swamiji himself had made no secret of his preference and partiality for Kerala when he said(to a devotee from Kerala), "Kerala is a fine place.... My soul is there. I thirst to return to Kerala. That is my place". The Swamiji, like his *gurubhais*, was a ray of the spiritual sun that shone in the sky of Dakshineswar. He was a wave of the full ocean of sprituality that was Sri Ramakrishna. That ray, shining with particular brilliance in the South, lit up the hearts of the people of Kerala. As that wave washed the Kerala shores and withdrew with a majestic, musical roar, it invited our attention to the ocean from which it rose and into which it merged – the ocean of *Satchidananda*.

It is said that the worship of Lord Vishnu becomes complete only with the offering of *tulasi* leaves at the lotus feet of the Lord. In Kerala, the worship of Gadadhara Vishnu, Sri Ramakrishna, in all propriety, should begin and end with the worship of Tulasi Maharaj Swami Nirmalanandaji, His child and messenger.

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^{1.} Swami Nirmalananda, Page 154

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF SWAMI NIRMALANANDA



1863 23rd December: Tulasi (Charan Dutt) born in Calcutta.

1873: Lost his mother.

1877: Lost his father.

1878: Completed school studies in Benares, Returned to Calcutta.

[During the years in Benares, Tulasi had met Trailinga Swami many times, received sweet prasadam ('stomach initiation') from the sage. At school, Hariprasanna Chatterji, who later became his gurubhai, Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj, was his class-

mate and closest companion.]

1880 : Passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University with distinction.

1881: First meeting with Sri Ramakrishna at Balaram Bose's house; received initiation fron Sri Gurumaharaj after going to Him a few times.

- 1881 1886 : Met Sri Gurumaharaj frequently at Dakshineswar and Cossipore Garden House.
- 1886: Inmate of the Baranagore monastery; received sanyasa from Swami Vivekananda on the 24th December 1886.
- 1886 1889 : At the Baranagore monastery .
- 1889 : Leaves the Mutt; A wandering monk; meets the venerable Pavahri Baba and Hariprasanna Chatterji, his schoolmate.
- 1892 : Temporary return from the wanderings; Alambazar Mutt; Left the Mutt again for penance and pilgrimage.
- 1896 : Returned to the Mutt towards the end of the year after seven years of penance in the Himalayas and the holy places.
- 1897: Swami Vivekananda's return from the West.
- 1898: Monastery shifted to Nilamber Mukherji's Garden House; Eyewitness to the Swamiji Maharaj's bold experiments like (a) Brahminising the non-brahmins (b) Accepting Miss. Margaret Noble as Sister Nivedita and (c) Plague-relief work by the Mission which profoundly influenced him.
- 1899: Belur Math established; the 'Acharya' of the Math with Swami Tureeyanandaji Maharaj, teaching Vedanta to the young brahmacharins; tour of Rajaputana supervising the Mission's famine-relief work;the Swami in charge of the Math in the absence of Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj.
- 1901: Unanimously elected Assistant Secretary at the first meeting of the Trustees of the Math; left the Math towards the end of the year for penance in the Himalayas.
- 1902 : Swami Vivekananda's Mahasamadhi; return to the Math.
- 1903 1906: In America as a preacher.
- 1906: Return to India.
- 1906 1909: Mission work in Assam, E.Bengal ,Kashmir and other parts in the North. A short period of penance in Chamba.
- 1909: Sent to the South as President of the Bangalore ashrama; Bangalore became his spiritual Head Quarters from 1909 to 1935.

- First visit to Kerala (Haripad); the Holy Mother's visit to 1911: Bangalore.
- 1912: First visit to Malabar (Badagara) .
- 1913: First Ramakrishna ashrama in Kerala opened in Haripad and the second in Tiruvalla.
- Power of attorney from the President Maharai regarding the 1914: legal status of the Bangalore ashrama; 'Shiva dance' by his gurubhais with the Swamiji seated as Shiva; his first visit to Ottapalam.
- First Ramakrishna ashrama in Malabar (Quilandy); Prabuddha 1915: Keralam, the monthly organ of the Mission in Malayalam started on the Vijayadasami Day. The Swamiji instructs it to be modelled on Prabuddha Bharatha in English.
- 1916: The President, Swami Brahmanandaii Maharaj's visit to the South: His Kerala tour from 26th of November to the end of December.
- 1920: The mahasamadhi of the Holy Mother.
- 1921: The President Maharaj's second visit to the South; Visit to Kerala abandoned.
- 1922: The mahasamadhi of the President Maharaj.
- 1923: Sanyasa given to the first batch of eleven Brahmacharins at Haripad.
- Brahmananda ashrama, Trivandrum and Yogananda ashrama, Alleppey opened; Sanyasa given to the second batch of two Brahmacharins in Bangalore; Flood relief work in Kerala by the Mission: Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj's visit to Bangalore; Tenmonth tour of the North from August .
- 1935: North Indian tour every year during this period of 12 1924 years.
- Sanyasa given to the third batch of seven Brahmachrins in 1925: Trivandrum. Opened the Premananda ashrama , Muttom.
- Opened the Niranjan ashrama ,Ottapalam. 1926:

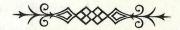
- 1927: Mahasamadhi of Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj; First tour of Burma (Rangoon, Mandalay and Akyab); Opened the Ramakrishna ashrama, Kayamkulam in Kerala and another ashrama at Ponnampet in Coorg.
- 1928 : Sanyasa given to the fourth batch of five Brahmacharins in Trivandrum and to the fifth batch of four Brahmacharins in Bangalore . Opened the Ramakrishna ashrama in Salem ; Second visit to Burma.
- 1930 : Opened two ashramas, at Kulathur and Palai in Kerala.
- 1933: Third and final visit to Burma.
- 1933 1935 : Opened five ashramas in Kerala Adoor, Aroor, Neyyur, Muvvattupuzha and Pudukkad; Accepted the Presidentship of the Ramakrishna - Sarada Math and the Vivekananda Mission, Calcutta.
- 1935 : Left Bangalore for good ; Sanyasa given to the sixth and final batch of five Brahmacharins in Trivandrum .
- 1936 1938 : At the Niranjan ashrama ,Ottapalam .
- 1937 : Ramakrishna Seva ashrama ,Calicut opened; Founded the Narendra Mission for Philanthropic activities; Trust Deed registered,making the ashramas in Kerala autonomus.
- 1938: Mahasamadhi on 26th April 1938.

THE RAMAKRISHNA ASHRAMAS FOUNDED BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA



No.	Name and	place	Year
1.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Haripad.	1913
2.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Tiruvalla.	1913
3.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Quilandy.	1915
4.	Sri Ramakrishna	Brahmananda Ashrama, Trivandri	um. 1924
5.	Sri Ramakrishna	Yogananda Ashrama, Alappuzha.	1924
6.	Sri Ramakrishna	Premananda Ashrama, Muttom.	1925
7.	Sri Ramakrishna	Niranjan Ashrama, Ottappalam.	1926
8.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Ponnampet.	1927
9.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Salem.	1928
10.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Kayamkulam.	1930
11.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Kulathur.	1930
12.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Palai.	1930
13.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Aroor. 19	30 - 1935
14.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Adoor. 19	30 - 1935
15.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Neyyar. 19	30 - 1935
16.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Moovattupuzha. 19	30 - 1935
17.	Sri Ramakrishna	Ashrama, Pudukkad. 19	30 - 1935
18.	Sri Ramakrishna	Seva Ashrama, Calicut.	1937

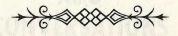
THE SANYASI-DISCIPLES OF THE SWAMIJI



Year	Name	Place
1923		Committee and the second second
	1. Swami Chitsukhananda	Haripad
	2. Swami Nirvikarananda	E continue man is all
	3. Swami Niranjanananda	The section and the first of the section of the sec
	4. Swami Sekharananda	magneriamos no
	5. Swami Chidambarananda	e property and the
	6. Swami Naishtikananda	
	7. Swami Chitprabhananda	
	8. Swami Chitbhasananda	o anne permentante de la comita
	9. Swami Subhrananda	m man secondestrum en etc. L. Reserves de la companya de la compa
	10. Swami Vageeswarananda	n ay acada ay a cara
	11. Swami Dheeswarananda	
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	12 Swami Desikananda	Bangalore
	13. Swami Shambhavananda	(Adams de propins
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1925.		
	14. Swami Nrisimhananda	Trivandrum
	15. Swami Ojasananda	,,
	16. Swami Oorjasananda	,,
	17. Swami Puranjanananda	,,
	18. Swami Balakrishnananda	,,
	19. Swami Arjavananda	**
	20. Swami Umesananda.	**
1928.		
	21. Swami Sreekanthananda	Trivandrum
	22. Swami Sailajananda	"
	23. Swami Adrijanananda	,,
	24. Swami Muraharananda	,,
	25. Swami Viswambharananda	.,
	26. Swami Vishadananda	Bangalore
	27. Swami Visalananda	**
	28. Swami Agamananda	
	29. Swami Nirvritananda	,,
1935		
	30. Swami Ramananda	Trivandrum
	31. Swami Parananda	,,
	32. Swami Satchidananda	
	33. Swami Amalananda	7.7 1.7
	34. Swami Krishnananda	,,





LETTERS, LECTURES AND CONVERSATIONS



LETTERS

Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama, Basavangudi, Bangalore.

31st March 1911.

My dear Mr. Narayana Pillai,

I owe you an apology for not writing to you ever since I returned here. I was away in Madras to pay my respects to our Holy Mother. I stayed over there for a couple of days and prayed to Her to bless Bangalore with the dust of Her holy feet. She was gracious enough to grant our prayer and accordingly came over here on Friday morning, the 24th of this month. She stayed here only for four days to the joy and delight of many hundred *bhaktas*.

I am leaving this for Madras tomorrow evening again, to accompany Her up to Calcutta. I Shall, most probably, return here by the end of next month. I can hardly tell you how rejoiced lam to learn that the work that you have started some six months ago, is growing steadily. The very name of Sri Gurumaharaj works an inconceivable charm on the minds of pious souls. He is the saviour of this age; people of every sect, creed and cult will come to know of that as days roll on. May He shower upon you all His choicest blessings and make you His instrument to administer joy and peace to the hearts of the suffering humanity over there.

I am extremely glad to know that our *Bhakta* Nilakanta is working with much zeal for the cause of Sri Gurumaharaj. Blessed are they that live for others. Please convey my affectionate blessings to him.

With affectionate blessings,

Yours in Sri Ramakrishna,

NIRMALANANDA.

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City,

13th September 1911.

My Dear Sreejith Narayana Pillai,

It is quite human that the passing away of the great soul in the person of Swami Ramakrishnanandaji from amidst us would grieve us deeply. It is an irrecoverable loss, but it is the will of Sri Ramakrishna and our human way of reading the sad event will never help us to solve the question. There is a divine hand in everything that takes place. If we do not lose sight of that divine agency, we can possibly retain our equipoise. Sooner or later, each of us ,when our term of work and duty will be over, will be sent for by Sri Ramakrishna.

We must always keep ourselves ready and prepared for His call. It may come any moment, unawares. I am very sorry to learn that you lost your only brother who was so loving, beautiful and self-sacrificing. May his soul rest in eternal peace and bliss, held in the loving arms of Sri Gurumaharaj.

It is indeed very gratifying to learn that the work of the association over there is getting on steadily and that our Bhakta Nilakanta is enthusiastic about it. May Gurumaharaj grant every success to it and may He enlighten the souls that come in touch with it.

With my love and kind wishes to yoursef, Bhakta Nilakanta and other friends.

I am yours in Ramakrishna.

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City.

7th Sept.1915.

My dear Velu,

I have had the pleasure of being already informed of your successful lecture tour in very many places in the State of Travancore. I hope your enthusiastic and zealous activity will undoubtedly enable you to canvas a very large number of subscribers and make the proposed 'PrabuddhaKeralam' stand upon its own feet. May the Lord crown you with every success. It gave me much pleasure to learn that everything had been so arranged as to make it possible for the first issue of the magazine to see light on the 1st of Thulam.

I am very sorry to know that you could not manage to get leave for an year. I believe it is a thousand times better to give up that wretched drudgery. Work for the magazine which is real *Karmayoga*. Before renouncing, one should practically do some amount of good *karma* to purify one's heart. So your service will be doubly blessed. It will purify your heart and at the same time help the cause of the Mission. As for the little money that you need for your old mother and other dependents, God will provide that when you sincerely serve His cause. Yes, Travancore will, through the Grace of Sri Gurumaharaj, be one of the best strong-holds for disseminating and propagating His glorious message to mankind. Blessed are they that are privileged to serve His cause, for they alone will attain immortality and eternal peace. I believe the Travancore friends will surely look after your personal needs and also manage to give you the neccessary amount to help your mother. So be up and doing, and I wish you God-speed and success.

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City.

10th Dec.1915.

My dear Kurup,

Glad to learn that the second issue of the *P.K.* will be out by the 1st of the next Malayalam month. I hope this time it will be free from those shortcomings which invited unfavourable comments from various quarters. I am very happy to find that Mr.Raman Menon is working at it unsparingly. May Sri Gurumaharaj very generously accept his unselfish love and sincere devotion to His cause! He will, undoubtedly, make a very rapid stride in his spiritual progress.

The work of Ramakrishna does not depend upon this poor and frail Nirmalananda. It is a unique privilege that He has very graciously let me be of service to Him and to His Mission. If any of us be so foolishly presumptuous as to dream that His cause will suffer because such and such a person has ceased to work, it will mean our absolute blindness of spiritual vision and total negation of faith in Him. So let us always bear in mind that 'to work we have the right and not to the fruits thereof'. Let us always remember that it is the work of Sri Gurumaharaj and as such let us be blessed by dedicating ourselves to the service of His sacred Mission.

I am very glad that Mr.Raman Menon is going out to Vaikom and Guruvayur to propogate the message of Sri Gurumaharaj by circulating the monthly over there. I wish him every success in his sacred undertaking.

Convey my best love and kindest wishes to all our friends at Quilon. With much love and affection.

Ever your well-wisher,

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City.

19th Nov.1915.

My dear Bhaktan,

lam very glad to know that you are doing well and every thing is going on smoothly over there. Let us have full faith in Sri Gurumaharaj that He will do His own work. How we shall succed in building an ashrama where His services will be daily conducted for the upliftment of the local world, He will show us the way proper. His work does not depend upon a poor and frail fellow like my humble self. We are only *nimitta* - *matram*; let us never lose sight of it. Sri Gurumaharaj will do everything, if it so pleases Him.

I am very glad to know that you have sent the *Maniratnamala* to press for striking. It will, I hope, find an extensive reception at the hands of the people over there. Insert a line of advertisement of the same in the *Prabuddha-Keralam*.

I have not heard anything definitely from our Seshadri as to the further development concerning the laying of the foundation stone on the new site in Trivandrum. However, if our friends are really earnest and are also ready, then I can start from here and finish the two foundation-laying ceremonies together.

I am now living alone here. Vishuddhananda has gone to Madras a little over a week ago. He will go from there to the North. The *Brahmachari* too has left this about a couple of months ago. I am expecting him back by the end of this month. All matters regarding my programme of tour will be made after his return.

Very affectionately yours,

NIRMALANANDA

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City. 26 th Nov. 1919

My dear Bhaktan,

Very glad to learn that you are doing well and that everything is going on smoothly at the Ashrama. Very glad to learn that Mr.— has returned to the Ashrama and has a keen desire to devote the rest of his life in devotion and unselfish work. Yes, as you say, the people that are immersed in worldly pursuits can hardly appreciate or approve of such a course of life. As such, it is no wonder that his people object to it. There lies a lot of obstacles on the way to blessedness, and unless a man possesses a firm determination, he will hardly be able to free himself from the tangles of family and home. Unswerving faith in the cause of Truth and a strong mind are the essential factors that will ensure success.

I am very sorry to learn that poor Narayanan has been deluded by his uncle, R.Das. He did not know at that age what a *Guru* was. He did not know at that time whom to seek as *Guru*. Sri Gurumaharaj used to say: "When one goes to buy an earthen vessel from a potter's shop, one stikes it to find out by the sound whether it is all right or not . Similarly, before accepting anyone as a *Guru*, one must find out whether he is an imitation or a genuine one.

If, by mistake, one has purchased a cracked one, will not one throw it away and try to get a good one? It will be a sin to stick to a false *Guru* and be cheated and deluded one's whole life. Tell Narayan to shake off all foolish notions from his head. They have been hammered down into his head by R. Das. My affectionate blessings to Narayan and my love and best wishes to Mr. Pathiyar.

Very affectionately yours,

Bangalore City.

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My dear Bhaktan, I have recieved your letter duly and was glad to go through its contents. I am also very happy to learn that you are in perfect health and that you find the place so charmingly suitable for tapasya. Stay there as long as you like and enjoy its spiritual atmosphere to your heart's content. Do not disturb your tapasya. When you think that you are very keen and eager to return to the sphere of karma, then alone it will be good for you to take up some kind of work, and not until then.

> Affectionately yours. NIRMALANANDA.

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My dear Velu Pillai,

I am mightily rejoiced to receive your very loving letter of the 6th instant and to read its very pleasant contents. Yes, the monthly is improving steadily. I hope, through the grace of Sri. Guru Maharaj, it will gradually command a wider circulation and cater its enlivening pabulum to the spiritually hungry and needy. It is an organ of His cause and as such it is bound to survive and fulfil its mission. Do not fear but have firm faith in Him and He will guide you all in the right course. Prabuddha-Keralam is bound to awaken Keralam.

Why should you so much bother about your own self? Mother knows the needs of each of Her children. Leave everything unto Her and She will show you the way out when the time for it comes .

I am very, very sorry to learn that Kurup is getting weakened very much. What is the matter with him? Why is he mortifying his flesh so much? No, tell him on my behalf, Sri Gurumaharaj does not want us to be 'astralized', but to possess iron muscles and nerves of steel. Tell him to shake off all such chimeric nonsense and be a man. Let him take some good and nourishing food. Let him also take a little open-air exercise.

Convey my affectionate wishes to Dr. Tampi, Kurup, Mr. Raman Menon and all other friends.

Yours very affectionately,

NIRMALANANDA.



· The months

20th June 1918

Quilon.

Dear Mr. Krishna Pillai,

I am glad to note that you possess a religious bent of mind and that you have a strong desire to spend the rest of your life in the holy company of sadhus. Let me tell you at the outset that to lead the life of renunciation is very, very difficult. It is not as easy as is generally supposed to be. It is beset with all sorts of temptations, hardships, privations and so forth. And then, after a certain length of time, a terrible repentance overwhelms the mind. I do not mean to discourage or disparage you. All I wish is, probe and sound your mind thoroughly before you take the leap.

I am leaving this today for Madras and thence I go to Bangalore. If you find it convenient to come over to Bangalore, say during your Onam holidays, I shall personally discuss the proposal you have made. There is no hurry about the matter. Ponder over it deeply and then let me be informed before you decide to come over to Bangalore.

Meanwhile, let me wish you success and joy.

I am ever yours in the Lord, NIRMALANANDA.

Bangalore City, 23th July 1618.

Dear Sreejit Krishna Pillai,

I am glad to note that your mother will not stand in your way. However when you come over here during the Onam holidays, I shall discuss with you your proposal and then decide as to your intended trip to the Belur Mutt. Meanwhile, try to recuperate your health, for it is of great consequence in the life of renunciation. A man of bad health and weak constitution will hardly succeed in achieving the end of his life.

Yours in the Lord, NIRMALANANDA.

* *

Bangalore City, 2nd Nov. 1918

My dear Krishna Pillai,

I have gone through the contents of your long letter and I find that you are again upset with your old notions of renunciation. I am afraid this sort of mental disturbance will hardly expedite your spiritual progress. Patience and perseverance lead to success in the long run. I should like to advise you to ponder over the same. If that satisfies you, well and good; if not, try to find out for yourself any other solution which will help you.

Yours in the Lord,

NIRMALANANDA.

Bull Temple Road, Bangalore City. 4th Nov. 1920

My dear Krishna Pillai,

I do not know what to advise you under the existing troubled state of your domestic affairs. First, there is the old and dependent mother; second, the straitened circumstances of the whole family. To leave them to their fate at such a pass would be diabolically cruel and selfish, just for the sake of seeking one's individual salvation. I leave the whole thing to you. Use your own discretion and act as your conscience bids. Weigh and sound your mind thoroughly. Be sure that the steps now taken will not bring about repentance and smite your conscience later on. First thing for the present, you need a strong and hardy body. When you get that,you will recover your normal strengh of mind. This is all that I can suggest now. As to the rest of your questions, you will have to decide for yourself.

Affectionately yours, NIRMALANANDA.

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Bangalore City, 26-12-25.

My dear N -

I am very sorry that you are labouring under a wrong notion. Do not get nervous because I sometimes point out some defects in you all, and at times very roughly too. But, it is because of my eager desire to see you grow up the way that you all should. It is due to my intense love for you all and desire for your spiritual welfare. They are all blessings and for rectification. So, do not be afflicted on that account and be cheerful.

With affectionate blessings,

Very affectionately yours, NIRMALANANDA Sri. R.K.Ashrama, Dinajpur, 2-8-25

I shall not die untill I finish off the little work that I have started. I will leave blessings enough for you all, my dearest children, to continue, develop and extend Sri Guru Maharaj's work throughout the length and breadth of Kerala. You have my sincerest and heartiest blessings, my little heroes. You will work wonders in the cause of Gurumaharaj. By His grace and blessings, you will ever remain invincible.

Most affectionately, NIRMALANANDA.







My dear Mr. Raman Menon,

Extremely sorry to learn of the very sad news of Saradamani's passing away. May she rest in peace in the loving arms of our Holy Mother. We are mere tools in the hands of God. His will be done. I pray to Sri Gurumaharaj to give you and your wife peace and strengtht enough to stand the loss you have sustained. Do not be afraid. Our human life is beset with ups and downs, weal and woe. Better days will prevail again and everything will be readjusted before long, by the grace of Sri Guru Maharaj.

With my love and blessings to yourself, your wife and children and to all our friends over there.

Most affectionately, NIRMALANANDA. My dear Sankara Menon,

I fully remember your noble desire that you communicated to me when I was over there last year. It is no wonder that people who are householders will hardly approve and appreciate what you propose to them. They will always try to throw obstacles on your path. You need not mind their opinion. Be resolute and firm. You can continue your present occupation and in a few months settle all your concerns and affairs. Most probably I shall be coming over to Trivandrum in the early part of April next. I shall then personally discuss the matter. Meanwhile, try to expedite the settlement of your affairs and I wish you every success in your cherished desire.

Convey my love and blessings to Dr. Tampi and all other friends there.

Affectionately yours
NIRMALANANDA.

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My dear Gopi,

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I am very, very sorry to learn that you lost your dear old father about a month ago. Accept my deep and sincere sympathy in your bereavement and convey the same to the rest of your family. May the soul of the departed rest in peace and bliss.

Death comes unawares. It is the common lot of every one under the sun. None can escape this stern law of *Maya*. All will have to shuffle off this mortal coil. The inevitable can never be avoided. Such is the hard and fast law of *karma* under the reign of *Maya*. Make the best use of your time while living. March on and do not look back.

Hoping this will find you in strength,

Yours in the Lord, NIRMALANANDA. My dear Sreejit S. Brahmeswar,

I am very happy to know that you have come out successful in the Chambers' Examination of the High Court and that yourself and all the others are, by the grace of God, doing well. I am glad to learn that you are preparing for the M.L.Examination of the Calcutta University and I wish you every success in your attempt.

The quotation that you have cited from the works of Swami Vivekananda is only a rendering in English of the authoritative opinion on the Vedic texts by the Rishis of old. Sri. Sankaracharya and the other commentators of our Vedic texts have unanimously opined that those portions of the Vedas which deal with ritualism, ceremonialism etc., and which do not tally with rationalistic theory of the Vedic truths are to be rejected. And, the *puranic* lores which are the Vedic truths in the form of mythology are also to be rejected if they do not conform to Vedic truths. Swami Vivekananda did not mean by the word "reason" our ordinary commonsense. "Reason" is that which confirms the truth visualised by the Rishis by their intuitive knowledge. In interpreting the Vedic texts, free thinking was allowed as it established the truths found in the Vedas. It had no further scope. Intuition is never contradicted by reason, but where reason cannot proceed, intuition can.

It is a vast subject and in the space of a short letter, it is not possible for me to do full justice to your question. I mean going over to Patna next summer and when I meet you next, I shall try to throw some light on your doubts. Convey my affectionate blessings to your father and the rest of your family and accept the same yourself.

Yours in the Lord,
NIRMALANANDA.







My dear and Beloved Shambhu,

Your very affectionate letter written on the Vijaya Dasami Day, the memorable day when you took refuge at the hallowed feet of Sri Ramakrishna. May His Choicest blessings be ever showered on you and may they ever keep you immersed in His Divine effulgence radiating bliss and peace. He was the consummation of all the past avataras and a living demonstration of spirituality itself, He came to fulfil and to establish peace and harmony in the domain of various religions by demonstrating their underlying unity. And age-long disputes, dissensions and discord, He came to bring to an end. That was the mission of His life. Once more, the spiritual history was repeated.

What you have stated with regard to your present mental attitude is wholly in accordance with our scriptural injunction. It is the actual experience of all the Hindu sages. I am also very glad to read the abstract from your prayer. Sri Guru Maharaj used to teach us how to pray. He said that in all our prayers, our lips must correspond to our hearts. That must be the guiding principle of every prayer. Hence your prayer is absolutely correct.

A *Jnani* wants complete unification with God but a *Bhakta* wants to be ever in communion with Him. A *Bhakta* says, 'I do not want to be converted into sugar - *Brahman* but I want to enjoy sugar'. Both are correct. The difference is purely temperamental. So, Sri Ramakrishna said, 'None else but he, whose present birth is the last, shall come unto me'; it is the solemn promise of Sri Guru Maharaj. You are one of His accepted children and you need have, on that score, no cause of fear whatsoever of a rebirth. Your life is insured. *Jai Sri Gurumaharaj ki jai*. You are saved and He has vouchsafed that guarantee.

With ever so much love for you and yours,

Affectionately yours, NIRMALANANDA.







Mother Snehalata Devi,

I am sorry to learn that you are not well. Why did you not write in detail about the nature of your illness? I pray to the Lord that He may cure you and restore you soon to health. Make me happy by replying as to how you are now. No mother, there is no harm in praying that your son-in-law may have faith and devotion in the Lord. On the

contrary, it would only do good . Some say that there is no God and that everything has come out of Nature. We should pray to the Lord for their good, as well as for the illumination of their mind.

There is no harm if a woman does not marry. Why should one who does not wish at all to enjoy worldly happiness, marry? Her mind and heart, all have been given to the Lord and she feels the highest bliss and peace in Him. If she is compelled to marry, she will have to endure a life of intense restlessness and misery. But, it would not be good for those who have even a little worldy desire. It would be very bad for them to remain unmarried. If they remain as house-holders for some time, their worldly desires will decrease and die away.

What is it that Jaya says? Give her my love and blessings. Ask her to write to me in a letter about her dream and the *mantra*. I hope to be there by the 20th February. I pray that the Lord keeps you all in peace and happiness. Don't be agitated, mother, I bless you. May you have intense devotion and faith .May the Lord bless you and grant you His vision so that you will have the highest peace and bliss.

NIRMALANANDA







Srimathi Annapurna Devi,

My heart's blessings to you. After the birthday festival of Sri Ramakrishna, I shall be going to Calcutta. Don't be worried if I delay in writing letters. Iam alone here; I have so much work that I find no leisure. Can I ever be angry with you? You are my beloved daughter. Why should you fear? By the grace of the Lord, you will have intense devotion and faith. He will give you supreme peace. And you will remain immersed in the madness of divine love. Believe in Him and depend on Him and wait in patience. He will make everything straight in time.

Observe the birthday celebration of the Lord in the following manner: On the second day of the bright fortnight after Shivaratri, worship Him in a special manner with *payasa*, sweetmeats and other offerings. After that, meditate, do *japam* etc. In the end, let all the members of the house take *prasad* together. It will be enough if you do like this. My heart's love and blessings to you and to all the members of your house.

Your well wisher, Father.

Srimathi Annapurna Devi,

I am very happy to know that you are well in body and mind, by the grace of the Lord. I pray at His Lotus feet that you may have all-sided and unshakable faith and devotion.

Both Sri Ramakrishna and your *Ishta-deva* are one and the same. If you meditate on the one, it is the same as meditating on both. If you realize one, you realize both. If you can meditate on Sri Ramakrishna, it is the same as meditating on your *Ishta-murthi*. Hence it is sufficent if you meditate on Sri Ramakrishna. Continue the *Japa* in the same manner as you are doing now. I am very happy to know that your third daughter has got the *mantra* in dream. Ask her to do *Japa* with that *manthra*. She should not reveal the *mantra* to others. Convey to her my love and blessings. That which you have heard at night while in the waking consciousness are the words of the Lord. In time, He will grant you His vision. Have no doubt about it. Pray always at His Lotus feet that He may fill your heart with love and devotion. Don't pray for anything else. If you get devotion and faith, you will be granted His vision. He will grant Himself to you in due time.

My love and blessings to you.



Srimathi Annapurna Devi,

I am glad to know that —'s Upanayana ceremony will be celebrated soon by the grace of the Lord. Don't be sorry that I may not be present at that time. Have the puja, dhyana etc., of your Ishtadevata and that alone will do; there is no need of any other puja. If the root of a tree is watered, there is no need for watering the other parts. Don't be agitated by what other people say. Practise what I have told you. All work should be done without any desire. Dedicate the fruits of the work at the Lotus feet of the Lord. That will do good to you all. I will be in your place during the month of March.

My love and blessings to you all.

Srimathi Annapurna Devi,

What you have seen in your dream is no illusion. It is said in the Chandi that the Mother Jagadamba is manifest in the world in all female forms. Every woman is a part of Her manifestation. Our Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna saw this manifestation and part of the Mother in every woman. Perhaps, you might have read this in His Life. In the Puranas also, it is said that Sri Krishna has become Kali and Sri Radha is offering Pushpanjali and sandal paste at His lotus feet. Don't be frightened at seeing such dreams. He shows you that He is in all and that He Himself has taken the forms of all gods and godesses.



My dear Mr. Chennaya,

I am very sorrry to know that you are still troubled with exema. May Sri Gurumaharaj make you rid of it pretty soon. I was able to reach Calcutta in time to see our revered and beloved Swami Saradanandaji at least for a few hours. He was almost unconscious outwardly and was unable to speak as the tongue was paralysed. He passed away very calmly the same midnight with a blissful smile on his face. One of the biggest gems of our Mission, we lost in him. There is not at persent any one who is fit to occupy his position. It is an irrecoverable loss. His place will remain ever unfilled. Sri Gurumaharaj alone knows how the activities of our Mission will be guided and conducted. May He bless it with adequate power and vitality to fulfil the mission of its life.

There will be some important changes in the administration of our Mission and in connection with that, a meeting of the Board of Trustees, election of the General Secretary and sundry other things will take place. I am asked to be present in all these items of work. Hence I shall have to stay here for some time. Besides, there are calls and invitations from far and near places which I have already promised to accept. I believe I will very probably be able to return to Bangalore just a few days before the Birthday Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda.

My dear Kunhiraman,

Very glad to know that the flooring of the ashrama will be complete in another fortnight. Sri Mahapurushji came over here on the 22nd ultimo. He will stay here perhaps for a couple of weeks more and thereafter will leave for Madras. I am very busy now on account of his stay here. I shall have to stay here as long as he remains here. I will also have to go to Madras with him when he leaves this. I will return to Bangalore after a week's stay in the Madras Mutt. After my return to Bangalore , I shall write to you. Meanwhile, try to hasten the completion of the ashrama building. The programme of the ceremony on the day of opening will be as follows:-

Morning - 8 to 10 a.m. Procession with *bhajana* and distribution of *prasad*.

Noon - 12 to 2 p.m - Feeding hungry Narayanas.

Evening: Lectures.

Consult V.K. and Pathiyar if anything else in the programme needed addition. To defray the expenses of the day, you will have to collect materials and a little money.

Convey my affectionate blessings to V.K.Pathiyar and all other friends.

With my affectionate blessings to you all.



EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS TO SRI. AMIYA DUTTA.

I. Whenever you get an opportunity, go on with mental japam of the mantra. In whatever condition you may be – while eating, resting, bathing or walking – keep continuous remembrance of the Lord. There is no restriction for you. Do this at all times and in all conditions. The Lord Himself has taken all your responsibilities. I assure you that He protects you. Have no fear, worry or anxiety.

Sri Ramakrishna used to say, 'meditate in a corner, in the forest or in the mind'. To meditate and go on with the *japam* mentally is the best. With devotion and faith, call on the Lord. This is the essential thing. Call

upon Him with the simplicity of a child. Know the Lord to be your very own and repeat His name. That would be enough. You need not do anything else. If, however, you get an opportunity, do what you think to be good, choosing a place where there will be no trouble or confusion. Have no fear; He is looking after you at all times and protecting you from all troubles and dangers, seated in your heart as the *Antaryamin*. When you have taken refuge in Him, what fear have you? What anxiety? Depend on Him, believe in Him and be at ease. None can do any injury to you here or hereafter. Wherever you may be and in whatever condition, I assure you that He is leading you to perfect peace.

II. Father and Mother are the first *Gurus* in this world. Serving them will do you good. Always lead a pure life. Bhagavan is *Antaryamin*. He is everywhere. He is in your own heart. Pray to Him always. Having faith in Him, go on with your duties. By His grace, everything will be all right. In a new environment, the mind will not be able to attend to its work properly for some time, in the beginning. But after a time, everything will be all right.

'I have to live with all sorts of people here. How can I improve myself?', you ask. The improvement or degradation of a person depends on his own mind and character. Externally, live with them as if you are one of them. But know in your heart of hearts that you are completely different in your thought and outlook and remain in your own *bhava*. If you be in your own *bhava* mentally, you will improve. Sri Ramakrishna used to say 'meditate in the corner, forest or mind.' You need not have any anxiety. The Lord is looking after you, protecting you. Cast all your burden on Him and always think of Him, remember Him constantly. Pray to Him wholeheartedly. Then you will get great strength, happiness and peace. It would be sufficient if you do this. Nothing else is necessary.

III. I am anxious and sorry to learn that your health is getting worse day by day. Take particular care to keep your body healthy and strong. If you are not healthy, your mind will not be inclined to do any work. So be very careful and try to regain your health soon.

I am glad to know that the new teacher who has joined your school recently is a very good girl. That school in which the majority of teachers are of good character will prosper in all directions. The object of literacy is to get manliness. If you get manliness, all the divine *bhavas* and qualities will in time manifest in you. Then the purpose of human life is

accomplished. That learning which helps to increase luxury and sense-gratification will surely produce much evil. The education, culture, ways and manners of India should be in the Indian way. Then alone will it bring out good results. This marks out India from other nations. Imitation of the west will pave the way for the destruction of Indian life. If our special feature as a nation is to be preserved, this sort of blind imitation is not at all good.

With blessings,
Nirmalananada

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My Dear Sukhananda,

Very glad to learn that the Shiva temple construction has been completed. I am very sorry that I am unable to go over there to perform the ceremony of consecration. You can do it on the Shivaratiri day in the manner stated as under. At 9 p.m., make puja and mangalarathi, with naivedyam of fruits and sweets. On the following morning, make the same puja and manglarathi and offer all kinds of cooked Naivedyam such as rice, sambar, payasam etc., together with fruits and sweets. Invite and feed the devotees and a few poor Narayanas. Thereafter, daily puja and offering in an ordinary way just as is done for Gurumaharaj may be performed. Very glad to know that Mr. Krishnan Nair has borne most of the expenses for the temple. May Lord Shiva bless him. Convey my love and blessings to him and also to all other devotees. All are doing well here.

With love and blessings,

NIRMALANANDA.

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Dear Subrahmanian Nambudiripad,

Sri Swami Nirmalanandaji has received your letter dated 1-6-'34.He has asked me to request you not to worry but to go on with your intense

faith so that you will surely reach the goal in this life itself. The omnipresent and omniscient Lord understands your *sadhana* and He will lead you to the goal. Faith and strength of mind are the two things wanted. Weak-minded men can achieve a little in this world. Sri Swamiji has asked me to inform you that you would have every success in your practice.

Believe that you are doing the right thing and pray to your Ideal to guide you whenever you feel any difficulty. Everything will be all right. Try to increase your mental strength so that you will be able to avoid disappointment. Of course, dissatisfaction helps growth, but disappointment causes degradation. You are progressing and you will progress till you reach the goal. So do not worry, Sri Bhagavan and Swamiji will lead you properly, Sri. Swamiji assures you.

Sri Swamiji has asked me to inform you that he is sending his blessings to you. I am writing this letter as directed by him.

Yours sincerely, SWAMI VISHADANANDA.

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My dear Gopi,

Glad to know that the Sevasharma, now removed to a better building, is working well. Very sorry to learn that your brother-in-law passed away on the 2nd of April. May his soul rest in eternal peace. It is quite human that at times one feels disinclined to work. It will pass off after a time and one's normality is bound to return in due course. So, do not be nervous about it. Life is rarely smooth. Its path is ever beset with diverse kinds of rubs, ups and downs. It is the hard and fast law of Maya. None can escape its rigour. All uniformly groan under its cruel pressure. It is an unalterable, rigid law; so, do not get awed. Fight on boldly, success or failure; then alone you can expect to reach your goal.

Convey my love and blessings to all at the Ashrama and also to K.Menon and other friends over there.

Yours in the Lord, NIRMALANANDA Dear C -,

I am very glad to know that you are well as also the bhaktas there * * * If the element of autocracy enters an organisation, know for certain that it is clearly going the way of degradation and downfall. The principle of any society or organization should be, 'Let all join hands and work; whether we win or lose, it is of no consequence'. Where this principle is wanting, degradation is the necessary consequence. I need not say furthur in this matter. My blessings to all.

Yours affectionately,

NIRMALANANDA.



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THE INHERENT STRENGTH OF HINDUISM

(Summary of the Swamiji's speech at Haripad during his first visit to Kerala in 1911, taken from Prabuddha Bharata of May 1911)

Ce began by saying that some western missionaries were prone to remark that Hinduism, in course of time, would fall into oblivion and that Christianity would swallow it up. He then continued "Is not the present Hindu religion as strong as it was of yore, illumining the depths of the hearts of the Hindus, the same as of old? Hinduism need not have any fear at the hands of the so-called religious reformers who are springing up in this land of religion like mushrooms".

Making a comparative study of the different religions, the Swami went on, "we are led to understand that religions generally are built round some person or book. Such religions are bound to fall with that person and that book. Hinduism is neither built round any particular person, nor does it stand upon any book. But it may be asked, who Rama, Krishna, and other avataras were? The answer is that Rama and Krishna were illustrations of the principles of our ancient religion and were worshipped only as such. The Hindu religion had been in existence long before these avataras. As for the Veda, it is accumulated knowledge without beginning or end, and who would think of writing such a book? It is coeval with creation. It is said of Brahman, The sword cannot pierce It, fire cannot consume It, water cannot wet It, and the wind cannot dry It'. And the Veda is like that. It is knowledge without beginning and end, undying and eternal."

Swamiji went on to say: "This Veda, at a time when there was neither paper nor pen nor any writing materials, remained in the form of *Sruti* and *Smriti* which, after a considerable lapse of time, have been embodied in book form. Hinduism further contained one special characteristic which could not be observed in any other religion in the world,

namely, that it could satisfy all minds. The most materialistic minds that hungered after action, the minds that would discard all popular forms of worship, but would look into the ocean of cause and effect and would be satisfied only by scientific investigation and mental analysis, the minds that would seek an underlying unity in all the diversity in the world, the Supreme *Isvara*, the *Para-Brahman* or God the Absolute, and the minds that never cared to peep into the inscrutable beyond, but would rather rest content in pondering and concentrating with whole-hearted attention and devotion upon God in some personal form, -all these minds whether they followed the several paths of *Karma Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga or Bhakti Yoga*, would be satisfied only by the Hindu religion.

Other religions were only for the *Bhakti Yogins*. The versatility of Hindu religion was just the reason why the message of Sri Ramakrishna as preached by his devoted disciple, Swami Vivekananda found such ready favour and instantaneous acceptance in the highly advanced and intellectual minds of America and Europe, in whose eyes the teachings of modern Christian Missionaries were but exploded theories in the test of scientific analysis and investigation. Swami Vivekananda used to say that the religion in Europe was like a particular kind of coat cut according to one measurement which every man must wear, whether it would fit him or not. But the Hindu religion is so vast that it can take any person with any turn of mind into its fold. It is for this reason that Hinduism has stood the test of centuries, and it will do so without doubt to the very end of time".







SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(Brief notes of a lecture delivered by Swami Nirmalanandaji in September 1911 during his first visit to Trivandrum.)

ome years ago, there lived a *Brahmin* of extra-ordinary piety in a village in Bengal. Though he was very poor, he would not accept charity. Almost the whole of his time was spent in the worship of God. There is a story regarding the depth of his devotion. I myself heard it from the

people of his village when I went there. One day, this pious Brahmin went to pay a visit to his daughter who was living in a place about eight miles from his village. When he was about to reach his destination, he saw a forest full of flowers fit for worship. At once he forgot all about the purpose of his journey. He collected many beautiful flowers, returned home and was lost in ecstasy worshipping God with those flowers. His wife asked him why he had returned so soon after his visit to his daughter. It was then that he remembered the intended visit to his daughter! It is no wonder that a God -intoxicated son, Sri Ramakrishna, was born to this great Brahmin who was a prince among *Bhaktas*.

There is a story told by the village people about the birth of Sri Ramakrishna. That pious *Brahmin* once went to Gaya, sacred among us for the propitiation of the *pitris*. He performed all the rites prescribed by the *shastras* with his usual faith and devotion and went to sleep at night, exhausted by the penance, fast and work of the day. At once he had a vision. Gadadhara, the Lord Himself, appeared before him and informed him that He would incarnate as his son. Remembering his poverty, the devotee raised many objections. But the Lord paid no heed to them and repeated His resolve to incarnate as his son.

About this time, the pure-minded wife of the *Brahmin* who was in their village had another experience. She went to the local temple with a few companions. She felt that a power had entered her from the God of that temple. Her friends, on hearing this, made fun of her. From that day, she used to have many visions and experiences such as hearing the divine music of the flute of Sri Krishna. When she told these things to her friends, they thought that she had gone crazy. But when her husband returned from Gaya and heard of the matter, he comforted her with the assurance that he had also similar experiences which showed that the Lord was going to bless them soon.

In due course, a son was born to them; He became the world-famous Sri Ramakrishna. The father named him Gadadhar on account of his firm conviction that the Lord Gadadhar had incarnated as his son, as had been foretold during the vision. The boy grew up and became an expert in all kinds of games. At the proper age, he had to go to school. But he protested saying that the object of such education was but the earning of bread and butter. What he sought was the supreme knowledge! Still by the compulsion of his elder brother who was a great *pandit*, he attended school for a time. But he learnt practically nothing from there.

In a short time, he gave up that system of studies and engaged himself in playing with his companions, listening to the recitals of the sacred stories and reciting them himself to those who were delighted to hear them. Many were surprised at the tremendous memory of the boy who could recite even the longest poems after hearing them but once.

Once while he was playing in the fields with his play-mates, he saw clouds gathering in the sky and at once lost all outward consciousness. He said that he was filled with ecstatic joy at seeing the blue colour of the clouds which reminded him of Sri Krishna! On another ocassion, there was a great feast in the house of a rich man of the place. The *Brahmin pandits* who had gathered there were hotly discussing some abstruse philosophical questions. Each one tried to show off his learning. But they could not come to any agreement on the question they were discussing. Gadadhar, the boy who was sitting in a corner, suddenly gave them the solution and they were astonished. All the *pandits* heartily blessed the boy.

About this time, a women of a non-Brahmin caste built a temple near Calcutta. The Brahmins began to say that no one among them would instal the image or conduct worship in that temple. The pious lady was very much distressed and sought the advice of the leading Pandits of the time. The learned brother of Gadadhar advised her to dedicate the temple to her Guru who was a Brahmin and hence there would be no objection to any one to instal the image or conduct the worship. She did so. And thus began the relationship of Gadadhar with the temple of Dakshineshwar. For a time, his brother was the priest and then Gadadhar had to be the priest. At this time he was in a peculiar mood. "Mother, Mother, will you not grant me Your vision?" was the incessant prayer of the boy. For a time, he controlled himself and conducted the worship in the temple. But soon after, he lost all consciousnes that he was in the world. 'Mother ,Mother' was the one cry that ever rose from his lips.

Sometimes he would put the offerings in his own mouth, at other times he would be looking at the sun from dawn to sunset. With the passing of each day, he would deeply lament that the Mother had not revealed Herself to him. He would rub his face on the ground in agony. He was prepared to give up his life because he was not blessed with the vision of the Mother. After such a period of intense austerities, he was blessed by the Mother. From that time, he would see his Mother near

him whenever he called on Her. Just as we see each other face to face, so Gadadhar used to see the Mother. He was always a boy full of mirth and fun because he realised that he was the child of the Divine Mother.

He used to ask his Mother for everything. He prayed to have the darshan of Sri Krishna and that most beautiful cowherd boy with that marvellous flute was before him. He wished to be blessed with the vision of Allah and Io! Allah stood in front of him. Thus he was blessed with the living visions of all the gods. This is the basis of the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Everything is the Mother, the Divine *Prakriti*; and *Prakriti* and *Brahman* are only two aspects of a same Divinity. Divinity assumes different names and forms according to the desire and capacity of each individual. All religions are but various paths to reach the same Divinity. God is the same though the paths may be different.

All his desires had been fulfilled by the actual, constant and living vision of the Mother. As he could not attend to the routine work of worship in the temple, another person was appointed in his stead. Gadadhar spent his days in a retired spot near the temple. At this time, a sanyasin came there. He found in Gadadhar a fit recipient for the highest Advaita knowledge and asked him whether he would learn the Vedantic truths from him. Gadadhar said that he would ask his Mother. She told him that the sanyasin had been sent by Her for that very purpose. That sanyasin instructed him and was astonished to find that this extra-ordinary person realized in three days the highest samadhi which he had taken more than forty years to attain. From that time, this illiterate boy, Gadadhar, born in an out-of-the-way village, began to disseminate Divine light to the world and became the Divine man, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa.

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SRI RAMAKRISHNA

(A talk given by Swami Nirmalanandaji in August 1917 at Trivandrum, Published in the Prabuddha-Keralam, Vol. II, No.12)

was a mere boy when I had the good fortune to come into contact with Sri Ramakrishna. I had the privilege of serving Him for about five

years. What shall I say about Him! He was a pure child of Nature without anything artificial in Him. He may be compared to a very rare and invaluable gem, fresh from the mine, without being cut and polished.

At the time of the *nirvikalpa-samadhi*, He had not the least consciousness of the body. But at other times, He used to be often like a child. Saying 'an ant has bitten me; I cannot bear the pain', He would be seen placing His hand in the ant-hole. (There is a belief among the children of Bengal that if one keeps one's hand in an ant-hole, the pain caused by ant-bite will vanish). Seeing this child-aspect, many would think whether He was the great *mahapurusha* who was expounding the most abstruse topics of *Vedanta* a few moments ago in such a simple, charming and homely manner.

What great wonder! All the doubts of the listeners ware dispelled by the narration of His bold realisations. He was never in the habit of clearing doubts by quotations from the *shastras*. What acquaintance had this illiterate man with the *shastras*? But nature was the grand book for Him. I doubt whether anyone had ever mastered the book of Nature so closely and deeply as He.

When Swami Vivekananda rushed to Him with the question, "Have you seen God?", His reply was, 'yes, my boy, and I shall also lead you that way if you so wish'. This bold reply cast a spell on Vivekananda and he remained devoted to Him for ever. Just consider yourself what an infinite power this uncivilised man must have had.

The great leader of the Brahmo Samaj, Keshab Chandra Sen, who had attained a very high place, used to visit this illiterate man and sit humbly by His side drinking deep the pure nectar of wisdom that flowed from the natural fountain of His holy lips. When Pratap Chandra Muzumdar and other magnates of the Brahmo Samaj would begin to argue with Sri Ramakrishna, Keshab would forbid them with the remark, 'It is not with such a one that you should discuss. Listen carefully to His words of wisdom.'

Many, tormented by various doubts and difficulties, used to go to Sri Ramakrishna for getting solace. The Master would instinctively know their condition and give them perfect consolation in an indirect manner. Keshab had a rule passed by his Brahmo Samaj that a girl be given in marriage only after she had completed her 18th year. But he himself had his 12-year-old daughter married to a Raja. Keshab was for this reason

ridiculed and disobeyed by many members of the Samaj. Distressed by this, Keshab came to Sri Ramakrishna. The Master knew nothing of these matters. Keshab sat in a corner. At once Sri Ramakrishna said addressing another: 'Birth, marriage and death are not under the control of man. They are all under God's control. It would be a tremendous foolishness for a man to make rules and regulations regarding these three.' Keshab understood and was consoled.

Sri Ramakrishna would not generally wear clothes when He was alone. Like a child, He would have His clothes in His armpit and run hither and thither. Visitors may be pouring in at that time. He would then say, 'Some are coming here. They are decent, civilised folk. It is not proper for me to remain like this without clothes. Bring them here', and He would search for them. All the time, the clothes may be in His armpit. How wonderful! I have never seen such a wonderful person in my life or even heard of such a one.

Many had asked Sri Ramakrishna about the state of *samadhi*. When He would attempt to speak of it, He would fall into that state. The devoted Mathur Babu had many a time tested him. Once He took Him to a house of disreputable women. They had been apprised of His coming and of what they had to do. They wanted to try all their arts on Him, but it was in vain. He merely said: 'My Mother has assumed this form also' and began to praise them as the manifestations of the Divine Mother. They could not approach Him. They were struck with shame, bewildered! They found fault with Mathur Babu for placing them in this false position by trying to bring down a *mahapurusha*. Mathur Babu was for the time satisfied. But later on, he began to doubt that Sri Ramakrishna might be undeveloped sexually and hence behaved like this. His thought was read by the Master who conclusively proved to him on another occasion that He was strong, virile and fully developed. Mathur Babu's doubts were completely removed.

Do you think that Swami Vivekananda would believe anything blindly? He doubted the Master as much as he believed Him. Sri Ramakrishna convinced the Swami of His power and greatness. 'An Emperor sometimes travels with all his imperial pomp and splendour and sometimes *incognito*, as a beggar. This time, the Emperor has come as a beggar'. These words of Sri Ramakrishna to Swamiji referred to the Master Himself. Vivekananda believed and yet doubted. The incident which gave him full conviction is noteworthy.

The Master was about to pass away. Physical power had been completely exhausted. He was lying on His bed. A few moments more and life would cease to be. Vivekananda was sitting near, still in a doubting mood. He was thinking to himself: 'How can I regard this man to be God, this man who is stretched on his sick bed and suffers pain like an ordinary mortal.' This was Vivekananda's doubt. At once Sri Ramakrishna raised Himself up, sat straight on His bed and said with great force: "Are you still in doubt, Noren? You do not believe me yet. He who incarnated as Rama in the *treta-yuga* and as Krishna in the *Dwapara-yuga* is verily this Ramakrishna, but not in your Vedantic sense. He who was Rama and Krishna is ideed this Ramakrishna"; and He pointed to Himself and passed away.

People belonging to various religions used to visit Ramakrishna. He would give each one the instructions befitting his character and nature. In this way, many atheists became great believers in God. I know of many instances of those addicted to drink, sex and other vices converted by His touch into good and pure people.

His advice to atheists was as follows. "I do not know whether God exists or not. If there be an Almighty creator, God, may He reveal Himself to me. Pray like this with a pure mind incessantly for three days without intermisson. If you do not see God by this, come to me. I shall show Him to you." These were not mere words. I know that many realised the truth of these words.

Sri Ramakrishna used to talk about God to people who were pouring in day and night. He was attacked by cancer in the throat. Many begged Him not to talk. But His reply was: "How despicable is this body. It is like a ripe pumpkin. It looks very beautiful from the outside. But the inside is rotten. If some good can be done by this perishable body for the sake of others, what can be more desirable?' This was how He lived unto the last.

A Ramakrishna is not born always. His manifestation is an extraordinary event, rare and wonderful, occurring in Nature once in many thousands of years.

SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SAME-SIGHTEDNESS

(A lecture given by Swami Nirmalanandaji on the occasion of the Sri Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration at Quilon in 1918)

hose who have known the *Atman* are same-sighted with regard to a *Brahmana* endowed with learning and humility, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a *Chandala'*, such is the teaching of the Gita. But the so-called *Pandits* of our land most learnedly expatiate on the text and prove that all is verily *Brahman*. But it ends there. Their practice is quite different. This is not merely to be repeated but realised in practice. This is the great lesson Sri Ramakrishna taught by many incidents in His life. I shall narrate one such incident.

Many of you know that there is a great temple, the temple of Dakshineswar near Calcutta and that Sri Ramakrishna used to live there. From the time when His greatness came to be known throughout Bengal, many would come daily to visit Him. Some of them were real seekers after God, but some others were mere sight-seers. Some so-called civilised youths came to Dakshineswar on a certain occasion, left their carriage outside the temple and began to walk round the splendid garden. After a time, they thought of entering the temple.

At that time, they saw a person standing near-by. He did not appear to be 'civilised', for he had but a loin cloth on. They felt sure that he was the gardener. They wanted to get some flowers from the garden to be put in their button-holes and appear highly civilised. 'Come here, gardener' they called in a tone of authority and the man approached them. 'Pluck those flowers and bring them to us' they commanded. The gardener did so at once. After they had visited the temple, they thought that they might also see the *Paramahamsa*. Thus they came to His room. O God! the gardener they had already met was seated on the smaller bedstead. They were stunned, they could not advance a step and stood there bewildered.

It was then that the truth dawned on them that the person whom they had ordered in tones of authority to pluck the flowers was none other

than the *Jivanmukta*, who had spent many years in various *sadhanas*, had realised God and become thereafter *Guru* to countless people. Struck with shame and sorrow ,they became humble, prostrated before the God-man and retired in haste. But, there was no change in the calm and unruffled face of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. He had forgotten that the persons who were now prostrating before Him were the very same persons who had commanded Him but a few moments ago.

When they left the temple, they told some others with great regret of the grave sin they had committed. Thus, we also came to know of it. One day, we asked sri Ramkrishna about it, 'When they commmanded you under a misapprehension, could you not have told them that you were the *sanyasin* living in this temple and not the gardener?' Bhagavan's reply was: What are you saying? Am I not the gardener? Yes, I am the gardener and the garden. I am every thing. I do not see any difference. What they said was quite true'.

This is the real same-sightedness, the state described by the Lord in the *Gita* as *samadarshitwam*. This is the state of the vision of oneness attained by a true *jnanin*. It is this state of non-differentiation we should try to attain by the complete destruction of our egoism. Without that honest attempt, there is no use learning the *shastras* and trying to expound them. Seek, therefor, to put into practice, what you have learnt. May Sri Ramakrishna bless you.



HINDUISM

(A lecture delivered by Swamiji at Trivandrum, From Prabuddha-Keralam, Vol.VI.)

e are called Hindus, and our religion Hinduism. It is a great mistake. We are not Hindus; our religion is not Hinduism. Other religions have their respective founders: Christ of Christianity; Muhammed of Muhammedanism; Buddha of Buddhism etc. But our religion has no

person called Hindu as its founder. How then, is it proper to call it Hinduism? The term Hindu was applied to the people living on the banks of the river Indus. It was the Greeks and the Persians who invaded India on the North-west that gave them that name. The name given to our religion by our forefathers is *Sanatana-Dharma*, The Religion Eternal.

Man has a dual nature. The one, animality, bewitching him by sense-pleasures; the other, Divinity, helping him to attain Eternal Bliss. To develop this divine nature and to attain Eternal Bliss is man's swadharma. Even to meet with death in carrying out this swadharma is preferable to being addicted to sense-gratification. Our Rishis have discovered four methods of developing this divine nature. The first is Jnana Yoga. There is the enquiry: "Kasmin nu Bhagavo vijnate sarvam idam vijnatam bhavati?"- By knowing which, O, Master! does all this become known?

Thus it began with the investigation into the cause of things. This grand philosophy, this Eternal Truth, was discovered and proclaimed by the *Rishis* at a time when the ancestors of the civilised westerners roamed about in forests, eating raw-flesh and painting their bodies. Here alone you find science wedded to Religion. While Christianity holds it a sin to doubt or discuss the words of the Bible regarding creation and other matters, our religion invites all intellectuals, logicians, scientists and metaphysicians to put the words of our scriptures to the most fiery test.

The second method is *Raja Yoga*, what attracts the attention of the scientists. The scientist wants to observe facts for himself and to experiment upon them. He wants to see things before he believes in them. And this is the path for him. He need not believe in a God, not even in a Soul. Belief in one's own mind and a knowledge of its workings are all that is required. The mind can be known by observing and controlling its modifications. So, *Raja Yoga* teaches us how to do it. When after practice, the mind is controlled, we can see that it is inert and that all its energy and powers are due to the immediate presence of the Soul. It is similar to a ball of iron becoming red-hot when put into the fire.

The third is *Karma Yoga*, the method of work. It says, 'come', come to your brethren, the poor and the destitute, the hungry and the needy crying for help. Come and help them .Root out your selfish desires and affections; pour out your energies and sacrifice all for them'. This is the message of *Karma Yoga*. What is your motive? A name for yourself? If so, you do not deserve that name, *Karma Yogi*. Do you love all, do you

feel that the good of all living beings is your good? And do you therefore work for them without an axe to grind? Then you are a *Karma Yogi*.

Last, but not the least, is *Bhakti Yoga*. Is there a God? Friend, why do you bother your head about it? Do you not see that there is a power behind the universe, guiding and controlling it? Can you do anything without the help that controlling Cosmic Power? The world was, before you were born; It will be, even after you pass away. It is not a supplicant at your door. Think of that Infinite Power which is also Infinite Love. The Lord of the world will take care of it. He alone has been doing it for eons. The world does not stand in need of our help. It is we that want its help. Try to reach Him in whom we live and move and have our being. This is *Bhakti Yoga*.

Bhakti is Love, unswerving and unceasing. It is not prayer or worship to secure wealth or health or children or success, but love for its own sake, love pure and unselfish. Love is the one motive power in the universe. Impelled by that power the robber robs, the murderer murders. Love is the form of that Cosmic Power. Portions of that infinite ocean of Love get solidified by the cooling bhakti of the devotee and take the shape of Rama, Krishna etc. As the ice melts and becomes water again by the action of the sun's rays falling on it, so the forms of the Gods melt into that Love again on the rise of the Sun of Knowledge and the devotee gets merged therein.

These four paths have all been well-established in our religion. Every religious practice may be found to come under one or more of these main paths. At the same time, our religion does not preclude the appearance of a fifth one. If anyone anywhere finds out a new method of developing the latent Divinity in man, our religion will honour him as a *Rishi* or an avatar. We have never been exclusive.

One of the great distinctive features of our religion is that it accepts truth from whichever quarter it comes. This way and no other' has been the dogma of every other religion in the world. Ours, on the contrary, points out numerous paths and gives us the choice to follow whichever suits us best. This many-sidedness and broadness are not to be found anywhere else. Other systems have to struggle against science, philosophy and metaphysics. They tremble before the onslaught of man's intellect. Ours has transcended them all and it shines with the light of Truth Eternal.

A close study of the different religions also reveals another fact: They have all, directly or indirectly, borrowed something from ours. The Trinity

of the Christians is an instance in point. The Greek Bible will prove it. The rituals of the Catholic Christians are taken from our religion. Even such an opponent of Hinduism as Mr.Hopkins admits it. Another great peculiarity of Hinduism is that it does not depend upon externals. Our religion alone takes man beyond everything, makes him transcend law and go beyond even the human mind. As I told you at the outset, I am unable to make a long speech. I shall, however, try to answer any questions or clear any doubts you may have concerning today's topic.

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ADDRESS AT THE HINDU VANITA SANGHA, TRIVANDRUM

(Prabuddha-Bharata of September, 1927)

he members of the Hindu Vanita Sangham, Trivandrum mustered strong on the evening of the 9th July last in the local museum lecture hall to listen to the learned address of Swami Nirmalananda of the Sri Ramakrishna Mission. Swamiji delivered an inspiring address in English touching upon the various problems affecting the welfare of Indian women. In the course of his address, the learned lecturer dwelt upon the practical aspect of Hinduism "which was best fitted for home-life, which was rendered so sweet by the hallowed presence and teachings of an ideal Hindu Mother".

"A rare type of the Hindu mother was Sri Ramakrishna's consort. She wanted Sri Ramakrishna to teach her God - realisation so that she might also enjoy the sight of God. When Sri Ramakrishna entered samadhi, this paragon of virtue prostrated at His feet and called Him 'Mother'. This was true realisation. But our women could not and need not for the present, aspire for such spiritual bliss. They should pay particular attention to the training of their children since our country's greatness depends upon the future citizens.

It is not enough if a thing is good. It should be used properly. A Hindu mother's responsibility was indeed great since the father often found it impossible to devote any attention to his children. Children should imbibe the sanitary and hygeinic methods of the west, but not their dandyism. There was then the question of marriage which should be based on principles. The wife is to share the pleasures and pains of the husband intelligently. Sri Ramakrishna's marriage was an extreme type. When Sri Ramakrishna was about to breathe his last, He said to His wife: 'No one is as fortunate as you are. Some might have great daughters. You are the mother of illustrious sons like Swami Vivekananda. The regeneration of India lies in the hands of the Indian mothers. Let Mother India be the mother of many noble Indian mothers. Let religion be the foundation of greatness. See that the children are brought up carefully and properly with this goal in view."

In-spite of the Swamiji's introductory remarks that he was least fitted to address an audience composed purely of women, the lecture was listened to with rapt attention as it contained precious gems of wisdom. Swamiji's speech was, with characteristic eloquence and clarity, translated into chaste Malayalam by Swamiji's disciple, Padmanabhan Tampi. After this, there was *bhajan* accompanied by *kolattam*.



AN ADDRESS IN ENGLISH PRESENTED TO SRIMAT SWAMI NIRMALANANDAJI MAHARAJ

Revered Swamiji,

The spirit of unity in the midst of diversity that you have maintained throughout your mission amongst the ostensibly differing communities of India and the resonant chord of constructive and synthetic thought

which you have struck as a true co-adjutor of Swami Vivekananda, make us approach you on your arrival here with our tribute of appreciation and regard and to place such tribute before you in a spirit of humility.

From the day you received your inspiration from the Great Master, your spiritual nature has grown stronger, brighter and higher, serving as a beacon light to the followers of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekanada in helping them to tread the path laid down by them for the service of our beloved Motherland and of humanity. We crave your blessings, and we earnestly trust that your parental care, friendly love and helping hand will always be extended to us in the journey we have undertaken.

We remain,

Ever yours in service and love,

Members of the Vivekananda Mission.

Calcutta, The 22nd Sept. 1930.

EXTRACTS FROM THE SWAMIJI'S REPLY

In reply to the Address, Srimat Swami Nirmalananda, the President of the Mission said:-

Lere is a humble and insignificant servant of Sri Ramakrishna before you. He is already three score and eight. Years of arduous work have told upon his health; and he is not a great speaker either! You cannot, therefore expect a long speech from him. Though I cannot properly express my feeling on account of the fulness of my heart, you will instinctively understand what is going on in my heart. You will feel it vibrating in your hearts too, for you have your hearts tuned to mine.

Only a few months ago when I was in Bangalore, I was very glad to know of some kind of socio-religious movement along the lines of Sri Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order going on in this place. Indeed slowly the idea grew up that, instead of frittering away their energies in the vain attempts at check-mating the centralisation of power amongst the monastic followers of the Ramakrishna order, they should organise

themselves for carrying the work along the lines laid down by their Master. This idea assumed practical shape when here was started an organisation fully inspired by the thoughts of Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. I became really glad when I heard of it and agreed to cooperate with it when asked to do so. I am glad to see that the young body is today vitalised and I am sure that in time it will radiate the light which the illustrious Swamiji came to broadcast all over the world.

Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda came to establish peace and harmony cannot desire in the midst of diversity and discord. Those of us, who are now desirous of carrying aloft their light and their message of peace and harmony to plant the smallest seeds of discord while engaged in the work of the Master. As such this new organisation is neither a competitor nor a counter-institution to any other organisation or movement which has similar ideals and purpose. This world and the sphere of work are large enough to allow more organisations than one to work side by side or in co-operation with one another.

However, I fervently pray to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda that their fostering light may guide your path. There may be many impediments and pitfalls, but these will be removed by their blessings. If we have sincere and complete devotion, we will live long and grow into a great organisation . It is bound to grow and spread its branches throughout India. The sons and daughters of the *Rishis* will drink at this new fountain of inspiration. The light that was blazing under the banyan tree of Dakshineswer will scatter its rays everywhere and illumine every sphere of activity.

History tells us that whenever a great man comes into the world, every advancement is made in all spheres of national life. Such was the case with Sri Ramakrishna. He came to bring peace and harmony. The so-called political and social movements cannot bring peace unless humanity learns to think that every human being is part and parcel of God and sons and daughters of the Almighty. When the world gets that angle of vision, peace will reign everywhere.

I fully appreciate the very kind and loving words expressed about my humble self who is not even fit to touch the dust of the feet of Sri Ramakrishna. I feel sincerely grateful to you and thank you from the bottom of my heart for your love to me. I pray that if my words have any power, may this nucleated body live long.

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INAUGURAL ADDRESS

(By Srimat Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, Chairman of the Religious Convention of the Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Mahotsab on Friday,the 20th Feb. 1931.)

he call has come to me. It is the inscrutable way of the Great Mother why She should choose the humblest of the humble to serve Her. There lies the mystery of the *Shakti*, the beauty of it, and the eternal love of the Divine in whose eyes there is true *Samadarsana* - all children are equal to Her. It is the same with Her divine child, Paramahamsa Deva. With Him there was no distinction between creeds and faiths, the powerful and the lowly, the rich and the poor, the devout and the profligate and between the temple and the market place. He embraced all and made obeisance to all, taught all and learnt from all. I bow to Him that He has, in that eternal spirit of charity and compassion, chosen me as His *Ratha*; but he is still the *Rathin* that speaketh unto you.

There were a thousand and one occasions when the Great Prophet Himself used to remain a mute spectator before a thirsting soul with occasional glimpses of smiles hovering between His penetrating eyes and quivering lips. For verily, it is not the *Vaikhari* speech alone that speaketh but the *Pashyanti* speech that rises in the heart like waves, passes beyond the bounds of flesh and falls like breakers on the hearts of the audience like sweet caresses to lull them, to soothe them, to embrace them. I am one of those who have had the good fortune to experience this touch, and I shall fail in my task If I do not carry that touch. May He infuse in me His *Shakti*!

Again, it is in that eternal fountain-head of *Atman* of that Great Saint that every warring creed found a synthesis. In His flow of love, religions became universal. In His simple but illuminating and vitalising rays of wisdom, the down-trodden and the cast-away found their haven of grace and peace

Verily, such a God-Man was born whose 96th birthday we have the proud privilege to celebrate here with you all, of different nationalities, faiths and creeds – one whose life was the living evidence of the depth and sweetness of all religions; One whose holiness, blessedness, unstudied

wisdom, child-like affection towards all men and whose consuming, allabsorbing love for God were unique and unprecedented. The Great Vivekananda truly said that long before the ideas of universal toleration and sympathy were mooted and discussed in any country in this world, there lived a man whose very life was a Parliament of Religions.

Indeed, the day of harmony has dawned with the birth of such a Prophet, who is the fulfilment of the Sages of the past, a summation of them all, who could conceive of such a harmonious blending of conflicting creeds and dogmas, of the different faiths of the world and who demonstrated it in every moment of His life.

Brethren, we remind you of a few precepts of the Great Prophet of Synthesis when offering you a cordial welcome on behalf of the Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Birthday Celebration Committee:-

Religion is one.

Verily, I say unto you, many a religion springeth up, spreadeth and decayeth by the Will of the Lord.

Therefore, unto all the devotees of all the religions of the world, Adoration!

Religion, however, is One:it hath been so for all times, and it shall be so for ever!

The Lord is One but He hath many Names.

Alas! That man should be quarrelling with his brother in the name of Religion! In the dear Name of the Lord Himself!

That the brother Hindu, the brother Mussalman, the brother Christian should all be quarrelling among themselves!

Understanding it not that He that is called 'God' in one country is the same as they call 'Brahman' in another:

Yes, the same that is called `Father in Heaven' is the same that is called 'Allah':

For, verily, I say unto you, the Lord is One;

But the Lord hath a thousand Names!







CONCLUDING SPEECH

(By Srimat Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, Chairman of the Religious Convention of the Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Mahotsab on Saturday, the 21st February, 1931.)

Gentlemen,

You have heard what the different religious protagonists say about their doctrines and cults. Being generally Hindu, you cannot but show respect for others' opinions and others' points of view. You have also heard the differentiations that make out the peculiar features of particular faiths. It all depends on the emphasis that one gives on one or the other aspect of human life. And I hope you have also seen the underlying unity wherein lies the all-embracing character of such a communion as we, humble harvest-gatherers in the field, endeavour to find out on this platform.

Whether you are a *Jnani* to explore and comprehend the truth of here and hereafter or a man of action to serve and co-operate so that men may achieve glory, or a researcher to attain higher pursuits of human potentialities, or a devotee to dive deep into the bliss of the spirit-life, there is underlying all these different view-points a holy thread that binds all, a synthetic entity that transcends and yet interpenetrates the domains of intellect, feeling and action. It may be subjective realisation to satisfy an individual or an objective orientation of the life divine to raise the lowly and to buoy up a foundering soul. I believe every faith has its prophets to give that orientation.

My friends, we have met here not only to pay our respects to all those prophets and seers, but also to avoid the errors of the propagandists. Our purpose here will be only half accomplished, if we do not meditate on the underlying unity and forget the lines of differences. I must emphasise that this is possible by a subjective realisation of *Samadarsana*. There are two and only two spheres where perfect equality is attainable; one at the level of death and the other of the *Paramahamsic* stage.

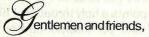
The latter equality is attainable by respect and liberty for all; liberty to think and liberty to act, to commit mistakes and to rectify them, to take initiative and to lie low, and finally by love for all, transcending all creeds

and dogmas, the canons of moralists as well as the limitations of both papa or punya. I am fortunate that I have come in touch with such a synthetic personality in Ramakrishna Deva. You may have come across others. All adoration to them. I shall close this conference with only three words: Respect, Liberty and Love which I have witnessed in my revered Guru transformed into Self-respect, Self-realisation and Renunciation. It is these key-notes that are neccessary in these troubled times of warring nations and malignant reactions. If in this small endeavour of ours we can imprint on you these three words, Respect, Liberty and Love, we think we preach Paramahamsa Ramakrishna Deva. And in that mission, we sow the seed of a great synthesis.



ADDRESS AT THE NIKHIL BANGA RAMAKRISHNA MAHOTSAB

(The following address was delivered by Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj on the 3rd of March at the Religious Convention held under the auspices of the Nikhil Banga Ramakrishna Mahotsab.)



Ramakrishna has become a household word to every Bengalee, nay, the whole of India and perhaps to several countries beyond India.

HIS MESSAGE

His life and teachings you have already heard from the many eminent speakers this evening. I do not like to add anything to it except a little experience that this humble speaker has gained by coming in touch with that wonderful personality. His spiritual fire was burning constantly under the Panchavati a little less than a century ago and His 98th Birthday Anniversary, we have all gathered here this evening to celebrate. It was a little over five decades ago that this humble speaker had the good fortune to visit the temple of Dakshineswar and to fall at His holy feet and recieve His blessings.

WHO IS A PARAMAHAMSA?

Who is a *Paramahamsa*? People called Him *Paramahamsa*.In my child-mind,I pictured a *Paramahamsa* as a man with matted locks,long beard and ashes smeared all over his body and I thought that he would be a very serious and grave man. What I found was that He was none of that;he was neither a *Yogi* nor a *Sadhu* nor a *Paramahamsa* nor anything of the kind. Though He was a little advanced in years at that time, to all outward appearances, He was a veritable child of Nature. With no poses, no assumed airs in Him, He appeared as a simple child of Nature, a child whose heart and soul were never sophisticated by the education and civilisation of the modern days.

He was absolutely illiterate in that sense. But He was deeply steeped in the spiritual wisdom of the *Rishis* of old as was revealed unto Him in His *sadhanas*. The whole of nature was His book which He closely read, every page of it. That was all. I could not understand whether He was a *sadhu*, for He was not grave. He would be smiling, sometimes with a vague look. Then, when at times He appeared serious, He seemed to dive deep into very serious thoughts and His whole appearance then would completely change. It was, in fact, a riddle to me, how to study Him and what to know of Him. Sometimes, He would behave just like a little child. I shall now relate to you a little story about Him.

Once an ant stung his finger. He was in pain and crying like a child. One of the temple *pujaris* seeing His childlike nature persuaded Him to put His wounded finger into the ant-hole so that the ant might draw out the poison of the sting and He would be free from pain. And He actually placed His finger there! Now, you see, the man who had controlled His senses and the mind had been quite beside Himself with the pain of the sting of an ant, and to be relieved of it, acted according to the dictates of the *pujari*, like a little child! This fully demonstrates His child-like nature. At the very next moment, however, He could have been found talking to learned men like Keshab Chandra Sen and Pratap Chandra Muzumdar. These two diametrically opposite characteristics in His nature seemed to me to be a special phenomenon of the spiritual domain.

WHAT HE WAS

We do not know what He was. We cannot identify Him with any particular form of religion. He was neither a Hindu, nor a Muhammadan,

nor a Christian, but He was all these and more. He was just the essence of all religions. He was the embodiment of the spirit of all religions. He was the real vitality of all religions and the personification of that eternal sprit of religions.

SANATANA DHARMA

Just now a friend of mine told you about Sanatana Dharma. Its literal meaning is Religion Eternal. Our old Rishis have told us that they have actually come into contact with the Spirit and taht they became the embodiments of the Spirit themselves. That was their realisation; they never claimed that to be their religion. It was Eternal Truth. Ramakrishna, I think, was the personification, embodied in flesh and blood, of such an Eternal Truth. Consequently, He was the vitalizer of all religions. We cannot identify Him with any particular form of religion. We cannot call Him a Paramahamsa or a great saint or a great avatar. He was Truth in a concretised form.

In fact, as days rolled on, I gained the experience that He was the very sustenance of all religions. He is the eternal sustainer, the vitality itself of all religions. Of course, we, in Bengal, must be very proud because His nativity was here but we cannot claim Him as solely belonging to us. He is the universal moon. But still we do monopolise Him. We say He is our own; the Christians and the Muhammadans also say 'He is our Ramakrishna'! This is due to the fact that Ramakrishna was neither a Hindu, nor a Christain nor a Mohammandan but that He was all and beyond all. This is my humble view of Sri Ramakrishna.

VITALIZING RELIGION

The next thing is that Ramakrishna had come at a particular stage when we were going to lose faith in almost all religions. He therefore came to vitalize religions. He took all the various existing forms of religion into His spiritual laboratory where He tested them and found the essence of every religion to be the same. This He derived not by intellectual reasoning or by a comparative study of all religions, but by His own experience of actual realisation. He was, therefore, a living demonstration of the Eternal Truth.

The next thing I want to tell you, gentlemen, is that in this particular age, there are sectarian views and various other disquieting elements. It is to settle this disorder and to bring about peace and harmony that

Sri Ramakrishna came. His cause is not merely national but international. He came to bring about peace in every home of every country in the whole world. He is the peace-harbinger of the whole universe.

STRIKING PERSONALITY

When we study the history of our ancient religion, we find one striking fact, that whenever there was any phenomenal ruffle in the domain of spirituality, there appered on its horizon a striking personality- a personality that is the concentrated energy of spirituality to settle disputes and to bring about peace . Thus we find in the Vedas the declaration 'God is one, men call Him by various names'.

In the *puranic* age, we find the advent of another harmoniser showing the underlying unity in all the then existing forms of religion, Sri Krishna. And now in the present age and at this critical juncture when all the different religions are fighting against one another and when the atmosphere of spirituality is thick with disharmony, disquietitude and peacelessness, a similar wonderful man in the person of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was born in the interior of a village of Bengal to reestablish the ancient religion of India, *Sanatana Dharma*. And it was He who brought the same spirit of harmony of all religions as did the *Rishis* of old.



PRESENTED BY THE CITIZENS OF PUDUKKAD



Before thanking you for your welcome address, let me congratulate you on the success which has crowned your efforts to establish a Sri Ramakrishana Ashrama here. Many matters crowd into my mind on this occasion. But just two words, I venture to speak. Firstly, to my brethren who have been labelled depressed on account of the social tyranny

extending over many centuries. I have come here with a message of hope for you. You are no longer depressed. Henceforth there will be none to suppress you, none can oppress you. Sri Ramanuja addressed you as Tirukulathar', children of God and heirs to His glory. You also have that relationship with God which the so-called upper classes claim to have. You and they are alike the children of God.

What have the Seers of old proclaimed about *Iswara*? What do the Vedas, the highest authority of the upper classes, say? *Sahasra seershah Puruashah* Again: *Brahmanosya mukhamaaseed...Soodro ajaayata...* All the four *varnas* are parts and limbs of the self-same God. The God of the Vedas is a God who is everywhere, who is in everything and who is everything. As a natural result of this conception, they have taught same-sightedness: *Vidya-vinaya sampanne... panditah samadarsinah*. While the Vedas have declared thus, what have the *Vaidikas* done?

They cut up the *Virat - Purusha*, threw away parts of His body and made Him a crippled God.It is such a crippled God and not the God of the Vedas that is worshipped by them. As a direct consequence of it, we have fallen. Sri Ramakrishna incarnated to lift us up from this fallen, degraded condition. He came for the good of all of all countries, of every living creature in the world. What you see here today is the light of the rays which have emanated from the effulgence which was in the Panchavati at Dakshineswar.

Many changes are happening in the world today. You should not let go this opportunity. You should strive sedulously and secure for yourself an honourable position. Give up indolence and despondency. This Ashrama will conduce to your progress. May God bless you and make you realise that He is not confined to an ashrama or a mosque or a church but that He resides within the heart of every living being; that He pervades all objects, animate and inanimate. May He enable you to worship that *Virat - Purusha*.

The mother of the Raja of Kollengode told me that it was a Nambudiri - Brahmin who first gave *bhiksha* to Swami Vivekananda when he came to Kerala. That offer of *bhiksha* to Sri Swamiji cannot but bear fruit. I was thinking that the Nambudiri society was not co-operating with the other groups in this movement. Now it is seen that first, at Ottapalam and now here, it is the help of Nambudiri gentlemen that has brought the Ashramas into being. This augurs a bright future for Kerala. I am very glad

that today we have mingled here as brothers without any distinction of high and low.

I thank you for your kind words of praise in your Address. I should like you to bear in mind that if at all I have done anything praiseworthy, it was not done by my power. Hearing you, I was reminded of a story in the Upanishads. The *Devas* defeated the *Asuras* in battle. The *Devas*, highly delighted, proclaimed that it was their prowess that defeated the *Asuras*. To remove their egotism, the Lord went to the heavenly region in the form of a *Yaksha*. Seeing a wonderful form, the *Devas* deputed *Agni* to ascertain who that was.

Agni went up to Him and made Him understand that he could burn everything to ashes. The Yaksha then threw out a blade of grass and asked Agni to consume it. Agni tried his best, but could not even dry the grass. Discomfited, Agni came away. When the other gods also were similarly powerless, Indra grew thoughtful. Then the Mother of the Universe appeared before him and told him that the Yaksha was none other than Brahman, that it was the power of Brahman alone that bestowed power on the Devas and that by themselves they were nothing. Knowing this, Indra and the Devas shed their vanity and egotism.

This false pride we see in the world even today. One Kuppuswamy joins the police force as a constable. He has no education; yet, even high personages respect his orders. Kuppuswamy raises his hand; at once the cars of the big-wigs stop. Kuppuswamy thinks that it is all due to his own power. Then one day, the haughty Kuppuswamy is thrown out of the police force and he becomes the old Kuppuswamy. I am Kuppuswamy. There is no power as my power. It is the power behind me that works through me. However, I thank you once more for your kindness. May Bhagavan bless you all.

ESSENCE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA'S TEACHINGS

A DISCIPLE'S ADDRESS

(From 'Madras Mail'.)

"Ramakrishna Paramahamsa did not come to create new sects but to consolidate and vitalize the existing ones", observed Swami Nirmalananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, delivering the Ramakrishna Centenary Address last evening in the local Ramakrishna Mutt. There was a large gathering of citizens. The Swami was presented with an Address of Welcome by the citizens of Salem.

ADDRESS OF WELCOME

Revered Swamiji,

We, the citizens of Salem, desire to welcome you amidst us here on the auspicious occasion of the Centenary Celebration of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

You had the privilege of actually sitting at the feet of the Master and are, therefore, eminently fitted to carry the message of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa to the groping millions of the world. Like your revered colleague, Swami Vivekananda, you possess an indomitable zeal and an ardent passion for work.

Your services to South India are invaluable. The existence of twenty Mutts in TamilNad and Kerala started and conducted under your guidance and inspiration is sufficient testimony to your zeal and perseverance in the cause of religious revival in this part of the country.

Salem has the proud privilege of being one of the centres of activity of the Ramakrishna Movement. Your occasional visits to this institution and your inspiring talks during those occasions gave an impetus to the movement in this city.

Your labours for over twenty years in Kerala towards the uplift of the depressed classes have paved the way for the historic proclamation of His Highness the Maharaja of Travancore, throwing open the State Temples to all Hindus.

We once more express our pleasure in having you in our midst on this auspicious occasion. ad laum aw aparted at most analy analytication a

We beg to remain, Revered Swamiji,

15-3-1937

Salem, Your affectionate devotees,

The Citizens of Salem.

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no available but now we worship many Gods in the form of

Opeaking about Sri Ramakrishna's greatness, Swami Nirmalananda said: "I never called Him an avatar. He is only a man. The spiritual fire he ignited under the scared banyan tree in the temple garden at Dakshineswar radiated the spiritual light throughout the earth."

Swami Nirmalananda pointed out that each nation had its own characteristic vital features which formed the backbone of that nation's life. He continued: "In Europe we find commercialism as also militarism, whereas the real edifice of India is religion and all other improvements that we find in India are more a superstructural ornamentation than anything else."

NOT FOR ONE SECT OR COUNTRY

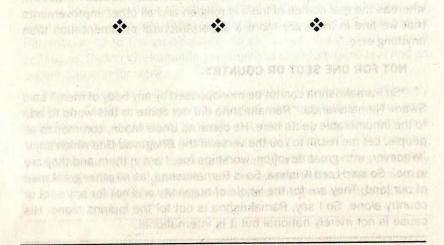
"Sri Ramakrishna cannot be monopolised by any body of men," said Swami Nirmalananda. "Ramakrishna did not come to this world to add to the innumerable sects here. He came as Uncle Moon, common to all people. Let me recall to you the verse in the Bhagavad-Gita which says: `Whoever, with great devotion, worships me, I am in them and they are in me'. So said Lord Krishna. So is Ramakrishna, as all other great men of our land. They are for the whole of humanity and not for any sect or country alone. So I say, Ramakrishna is not for the Indians alone: His cause is not merely national but it is international.

"He came not to create any new sect but to vitalize the existing ones. The real essence of all his teachings is to transcend all religions. He is the very essence and abstraction of all religions and spiritual forms. How can it create another sect in the world? Therefore, abstraction came to pervade all forms of religion with their sects and sub-sects and to vitalize and consolidate them. As Indians, we must be proud of Him, but we cannot monopolise Him.

"Change was inevitable, but care must be taken to see that only the form undergoes the change, not the real substance," added the Swami.

CONSOLIDATION OF SECTS AND RELIGIONS

"If we linger behind and cannot follow the trend of the times, we call ourselves orthodox," he remarked. "Even orthodoxy differs materially from time to time. Ramakrishna often said: `Akbar's sovereign must be exchanged for the current coin of today'. In the Vedic times, there were no avataras. But now we worship many Gods in the form of idols. That is good. Only, things should not be thrown away but should be exchanged. Thus Ramakrishna's teachings appealed to all classes and religionists, orthodox or heterodox. So long as creation exists, there must be variety, and Ramakrishna devoted Himself to vitalize and consolidate this variety of sects and religions. He did not come to create anything new but to fulfil all".



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A CLASS TALK AT HARIPAD ON 20-2-1911.

(EXTRACTS FROM THE NOTES OF SRI P. SESHADRI IYER, M.A, M.L)

CASTE

ri Guru Maharaj's Kingdom was spiritual and one of love. In his presence all were alike. In God's eyes there is no inequality. Difference in status, there will be in social matters, but not in spiritual ones. In spiritual matters, we do not look at the exterior, but into the heart.

Caste is not bad in itself. Every caste contributes to the general welfare of society. We should remember that caste is based on division of labour. A healthy society wants the labour of all castes. If any one part of the Social body is affected, it affects the whole system. We should keep society clean and in proper working order by applying the lubricant, Love. This was what Sri Ramakrishna had taught us. This was what Swami Vivekananda had in mind when he said in his Madras speech that he was a 'root-and-branch reformer'.

THE RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

An organisation which has a divine agency behind it will grow and cover the whole world. It will become perfect. The Ramakrishna Mission has a divine agency behind it. It was not mere men or money that brought it into being. At the time of His *mahasamadhi*, Sri Ramakrishna had no earthly possession whatever. His disciples, the young *sanyasins*, lived in an old dilapidated house, believed to be haunted. As for our mainte-

nance, no one knew whence the next meal would come. To beg of the educated circles in Calcutta was sorely trying. At the most, a handful of rice was all that was given after an hour's abuse, sometimes only the abuse. And see, how that band of poor boys has influenced the world! Did the Maharajas and Zamindars help them? No! The grace of the Lord was their help and the middle-class was its channel.

And therefore, I say that there is a divine agency behind this movement. From this nucleus of an organisation, the whole of Kerala will benefit in the future. It is the indestructible spiritual germ, Divinity, that is working through this organisation. The Mission is not antagonistic to any organisation. On the other hand, it will help all well-meaning ones, although we cannot subscribe to all their methods and principles. Our principles are what have been laid down by the *Rishis*, the seers of Truth. As one who was in the band of those few poor boys who lived in that haunted, dilapidated house, I have firm faith that it will grow.

THE BENARES SEVASHRAMA

About 12 years ago, two of our Brahmacharins went to Kashi begging their meals. There, houses are rented out and pilgrims take them up. When they are about to die, their small possessions are snatched away and they are turned out and left to die. The two Brahmacharins saw some such helpless old people. They felt for those poor pilgrims. But what could they do? They had no money. However, they got some rice by begging, prepared gruel and fed and nursed them till they were well again. Seeing their labour of love, some sympathetic people subscribed one anna, two annas and so on, for their expenses. The month's subscriptions amounted to three rupees. The Brahmacharins persevered in their service. The work steadily grew. And now they have a big house, a good hospital with all facilities for excellent medical aid. This is how all our institutions grow.

THE MURSHIDABAD ORPHANAGE

In Murshidabad, a whole village was flooded. Many children were left orphans. Our Swami Akhandananda saw some of them. Feeling that something must be done for them, he started an institution on a very modest scale. Mohammedan boys also were taken up. Gradually growing, the institution has now become a regular orphanage. There are many such institutions all over India. Slowly, steadily, they grow. They are

not advertised. They flourish because of the sincerity of the workers. What is wanted is genuine love.

HARIPAD, 14TH AUGUST, 1912

The Swamiji was staying in the Government palace near the temple. In the drawing room was placed a photo of Sri Ramakrishna dressed in kaashaya. Seeing it, the Swamiji remarked, 'only once in my life had I seen Sri Ramakrishna clad in kashaya. During a considerable portion of his Sadhana period, he had to wear kashaya. But ordinarily, he wore only white cloth.'

Q: How can we get bhakti?

A:- Bhakti is not the resultant of any karma. It is a gift from God, a feeling, natural and spontaneous. To get *mukti* there are means and methods, but not to get *bhakti*. Pray to God incessantly, and He may vouchsafe it to you out of His grace.

Q: Does the soul die in sleep?

A: Soul!! suppose you mean the mind. The mind does not die, but remains alive and active even during sleep. If it were not so it could not be so after sleep. The mind is like a lake and the modifications are like the ripples and the waves on its surface. These can be stopped by the practice of concentration and then you will know what the mind really is. The mind also is matter, but appears intelligent because of the *Atman*, just as a piece of iron becomes red-hot like fire when put into the fire. It is the light of the *Atman* that percolates and shines through the mind. An impure mind obstructs the passage of the soul's light; a pure one lets it out without distortion or diminution.

The pure at heart shall see God. The pure-minded alone realise the soul. And he who has realised the soul has no more fear. When Swami Abhedananda and myself were practising *tapasya* at Rikshikesh, we found a practical example of this fearlessness which comes out of realisation. There was a *sanyasin* on the opposite bank of the river. He was suddenly seized by a tiger. Even while in its jaws, he was shouting 'So'ham, so'ham. We could distinctly hear his triumphant shouts. It continued to the very end. We narrated this to Swami Vivekananda. He has mentioned it in one of his lectures.

One of the visitors requested the Swamiji to give him *Gitopadesam*. The Swamiji said, "It is enough if you have faith and devotion. With these, begin *pranaayama* and God will bless you. *Bhakti* is the one

essential thing, not book-knowledge. Sri Ramakrishna used to say that to kill oneself, even a pin will do; but to kill another, one must have good weapons and some practice. For one's own *mukti*, it is enough to have faith. For an example of pure devotion without book-knowledge, take the case of the devotee who was holding the Gita-book topsy-turvy; tears of love were flowing from his eyes. He did not know a word of what was written in the book; but no sooner did he take it up than the vision of Parthasarathi instructing Arjuna was before him. Try to have that kind of love .

ON MEDITATION

Meditation is very difficult in the beginning. But it becomes easy by practice. Regularity in time is a very important factor in meditation. As you continue the practice daily with such regularity, a natural groove will be formed in the brain and meditation will thus become easy. Beginners should never practise more than once in twenty four hours. It should not be stopped all on a sudden, but gradually and slowly. After meditation, take one ounce or two of hot milk or coffee or other liquid food, but never any solid food. Never speak of the Ishtadevata or the mantra to others. Any name of God secretly and sacredly uttered is a mantra. Be regular in the practice of meditation and the worship of your Ishtadevata. That is the first thing to be done in the morning when you get up. On some days you get concentration easily. Pray to God for sraddha and bhakti. When you have got these, meditation has become successful. Meditate on any part of the body of the Ishtadevata, but He should be seen in front When once you get concentration as soon as you sit for meditation, no formalities need be observed. That is what Sri Ramakrishna meant by saying, Sandhya ends in Gayatri, Gayatri in Om and Om in Samadhi.

A Visitor asked the Swamiji in Sanskrit:

Q: How can samsara be got rid of?

A: By the attainment of true knowledge.

Q: How can knowledge be obtained?

A: By being established in Sadhana-Chatushtaya — faith in the words of the Guru and the Shastras.

Q: How can that be had?

A: By the grace of God.

Q: What is the means of getting His grace ?

A: There is no formal means to attain grace. It is unconditional. Pray to Him sincerely, and you may get it.

Q: When will all doubts be removed?

A: When He is seen. Try to see Him who is far and near. All doubts vanish when He is seen.

Q: What is Maya?

A: Maya is Prakriti. Iswara is the Lord of Prakriti. Jiva, Iswara and Brahman are all really one. There is air in the room, outside it, and there is the all-pervading air.Limitation makes the difference.

ON HEALTH

A spiritual aspirant should take good care of the body. Remember the example given by Sri Ramakrishna. He has compared the body to a box containing a precious jewel. The box is taken care of, not because of its intrinsic worth, but because of the jewel it contains. The *Atman* is that jewel. We need not become Sandows and Ramamurthis. But we should have normal health.

SADHU-MELA, GURU-PUJA

Before retiring for rest that day, the Swamiji said:

This is the day of the great Himalayan festival, *Sadhu-mela*, the one day in the year in which we can workship the *Sivalingam* at Amaranath. On all other days, it will be covered with ice. If you miss this day, you will have to wait one whole year. This is a great day for all Hindus. This is also the day of *Guru-puja* for all *Sadhus*.

[Was the Swamiji alluding to the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and to this age when every Hindu is given the rare privilege of worshipping at Amaranath? Did he also suggest that those who missed this opportunity would have to wait for His next Incarnation?]

ALWAYE, NOV. 1916. (FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. II)

DIFFERENT PATHS

he Vedas, the Puranas and the Tantras lay down different paths leading God-ward.

The differences are due to the differences in the tendencies and temperaments of men. Can there be any one path perfectly suiting all types? In the nature of things, there cannot be. Take the Vaishnavas, for instance. Krishna, the Lover, appeals to some of them. Some others adore the Baby Krishna lying on the aswatha-leaf. Take, again, the case of the Shaivas. Some adore Him as Sadasiva, lost in eternal meditation. The same God as Nataraja, the Dancer is the ideal of another set of devotees. Worshippers of the Mother also like Her as Uma, Kali and so on. Now, which of these several methods of approach is right? It is only a matter of each one choosing what befits his character and taste. As many natures, so many paths.

GOD, GURU AND DISCIPLE

Your God is of your nature. If you have a liking for payasam your God also likes it. If you are a hunter and a meat-eater, your God will have good meat offered to Him. The bhakta's tastes and habits determine his God's naivedyam. No difference to Him whether you offer Him milk or meat. Have faith in the words of the Guru and strive incessantly to reach your goal. A true Guru perceives the samskaras of the disciples and sets them on their respective paths. If a disciple can do so for himself, he has no need of a Guru at all. But, he cannot. Love alone matters. Haven't you heard of Kannappa Nayanar who plucked out his eyes and offered them to his Beloved Lord?

KOTTAYAM, NOV.1916

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. II)

hat do we want? If you look beneath the surface, you will see an element common to all wants — the desire for happiness. Take any action and analyse it. You will find that at the bottom of it is the quest for happiness. That is the motive force behind every act.

What are the scientifically advanced nations doing? Fighting for self-aggrandisement. And India? She has been the victim of attack upon attack. But where are they now? They have vanished leaving their names in books of history, whereas India is still alive. Why so? Because of the vitality of her life-current. Each nation has its own special life-current; for India, it is religion. All other matters are secondary.

What material civilization brings in its wake is only too patent to us now. The present world war is its monstrous off-spring. The greatness of a country lies not in its having wealthy citizens, but in its producing real *mahatmas* who have attained peace and happiness eternal. Think not for a moment that wars, even if successful, give lasting peace and prosperity to any nation. Religion is the core of our nation. But we have to learn other things as well.

Knowledge is of two kinds, *Para* and *Apara* - knowledge divine and knowledge of mundane things. The knowledge of both should go hand in hand. It was because both these were imparted in the old *Gurukulas* that the pupils became ideal citizens and house-holders. The more a society produces such noble souls, the more will it flourish and do good to humanity. But what is our present condition? We have turned our gaze west-ward, consciously and unconsciouly imitating the westerners.

Reforms and changes are indispensable, if we are to keep pace with times. But their acceptance should not make us lose sight of our supreme goal. Applied material sciences alone cannot make you happy. You have to adapt your ancient customs and practices so modified as to fit in with the modern enlightened conditions. Our decline began the day we took to copying foreign customs and manners. Adaptation may be necessary in certain matters. But we should take care that it does not run counter to our *Aryan* ideals of *Dharma*.







QUILON, NOV. 1916. (FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM VOL. II)

SWADHARMA

ome people believe that the due performance of one's swadharma is itself worship of God. The work they do is for God. They hold nothing as their own. This world is God's garden. Every thing in it belongs to Him only. There is nothing here which we can call our own. Even our wives and children are God's. They are placed under our charge as long as it pleases Him and they are taken away at His will and pleasure. Work in this spirit becomes worship of God. This is the secret of Karma Yoga.

THE SALT-DOLL

Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna used to give us the interesting parable of the salt-doll. We have many things to learn from this illustration. When we come to know that the ocean of *Satchidananda* exists, there arises in us a desire to see it. As a result of our exertion, we reach the shores of that ocean. Up to this we are in the *Dwaita* state. We then realise that we are made of the same stuff as the ocean. This is the *Visishtadwaita* stage. The desire to probe its depth becomes irresistible and we advance into the ocean. And, like the salt-doll, the farther we go, the more we get dissolved, until at last, we completely lose our identity and become one with it. This is *Adwaita*, oneness. That is our real nature.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE EAST

Christianity is indeed a grand religion. Bethlehem was in a depolarable condition. So, the Lord came as Jesus Christ. You can never understand the high ideals of Christ unless you approach them in the old oriential spirit. Christ himself was an oriental. It was the orientials who first observed the stars rising at the time of his birth. Religion is inherent in the oriental. A true Hindu falls prostrate before Christ. A picture of Jesus Christ was kept by Sri Ramakrishna in his room. Christ never taught proselytisation. We, the easterners, are more competent than the westerners to grasp the ideals of the Bible. They can never understand them as well as we do. It would do much good to read the *Imitation of Christ*.

TRIVANDRUM, 22ND SEPT. 1917 (FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM VOL.III)

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Q: We have heard something of Swami Vivekananda. We would like to hear more about him from Swamiji.

A: Oh! What shall I say about him! You have already heard that he was a Hindu sanyasin, that he went to America, that he spoke about Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions. Before the Swamiji went there, the Americans had many false notions regarding the Indians. They believed that the Hindus were an uncivilised people, superstitious, half-naked and little removed from beasts. Swamiji's lectures removed those notions and awakened in them an interest in Hindu Religion. Several eminent persons began to accept Hindu ideas.

Q: How old was Swami Vivekananda when he met Sri Ramakrishna and how long did he live with the Master?

A: Swamiji was a student then. He lived for about six years under Sri Ramakrishna.

USE OF TEMPLES

Q: Since God is omnipresent, should one go to a temple to worship God?

A: Water is all-pervading. Yet, you can't get water here – draw it from this room. For that you have wells and tanks. Even so are temples. Holy thoughts are stored up there and they are therefore fit places for worship. The present condition of the temples is, however, deplorable. The priests have neither faith nor purity. They are mere mercenaries. To the non-brahmins they don't give *prasadam*, but throw it to them. They should be whipped and driven out to restore the purity of the temples.

SOCIAL SERVICE AND SADHANA IN SOLITUDE

Q: Is it justifiable for a man to go to a forest and to do penance for his own good? Is it not highly selfish?

A: Suppose there are four boys of whom one alone learns his lessons. The others waste their time but blame the former, 'you don't keep us

company; you only mind your lessons. What a selfish boy you are!' Is the reproach justifiable?

Q. But, Swamiji, who is the greater man?

A. How can a mere beggar help another beggar? That poor man doing penance and worshipping God is trying to acquire spiritual wealth to help the spiritually poor. You talk tall of social reform. Can you show me a single man who works altruistically for social reforms? My good friends! I have travelled from the Himalayas to the Cape Comorin. I have not seen many who work for the society except with some selfish motive. I know your householders. They draw large salaries but their neighbours may be dying of hunger. That is God's will', they say and pose themselves as great social reformers! These, you call social reformers!

If Swami Vivekananda had not become a *sanayasin*, could he have done anything for the good of the world? World-history will teach you that the benefactors to the world have been *sanyasins*. So now, you understand that a man striving to perfect himself is not necessarily selfish. Trying to do good to another without having the power to do so brings more harm than good.

Suppose there is a plant with a fence around it to protect it from cattle. A goat comes up and failing to reach the plant, addresses it thus: 'Oh! plant! how intensely selfish you are! You keep yourself secure behind the fence. But for it, what nice food you would have been to appease my hunger'! In course of time, the plant becomes a very big tree with many a branch; it affords shelter, leaves and fruits, not only to the goat, but to a large number of birds, beasts and men. Had it sacrificed itself to the goat, would it have been able to do the great good that it is now doing? Mahatma Gandhi alone does real social service in India.



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QUILON, 1ST OCTOBER, 1918. (FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. III)

THE FOUR VARNAS - THE WHEEL OF TIME

he Brahmins of the Vedic period were spiritually the strongest. Gradually their spirituality waned. That spirituality and brahminhood were imbibed and nourished by the Kshatriyas. By the time of Sri Rama, the Kshatriyas grew spiritually stronger. Sri Rama established the spiritual supremacy of the Kshatriyas. And you see, thereafter, the Brahmins going to the Kshatriyas for spiritual knowledge. Suka, the son of the great sage Vyasa, sat at the feet of King Janaka. Bhishma was the spiritual teacher of many a Brahmin.

But with the march of time, the power of the Kshatriyas passed to the Vaisyas. This Vaisya domination is noticeable more in foreign countries than in India. The might of Vaisya Dharma – trade, commerce, industry etc.– rules the modern world. Why did the English and other foreigners come to India? It is the might of the Vaisya that the west brings home to us. If you want to move with the times you must also develop your Vaisya power. But then, this Vaisya domination also must come to an end. It will be replaced by Sudra rule. We have ample evidence of its rise. The clash between labour and capital betokens the dawn of the Sudra rule. In the growing fight between capital and labour, you see capital going down day by day.

The signs of labour coming up are already visible in India also. Those who have been trodden underfoot and crawling on all fours have begun to raise their hood. Look at the non-Brahmin movement. Can it be forever that one class of people should be the slaves of the other classes? That age cannot last much longer. The time is not far off when they also will stand up and assert their rights as men.

Then the upper classes and their present-day leaders will open their eyes and lament: 'Oh! God! what a calamity has befallen us! How great we were! And now to submit ourselves to the very *Sudras* who were our slaves till yesterday!' Then they will begin to get glimpses of the truth, to become spiritual and to regain their lost *Brahminhood*. Thus gradually the Brahmana-age will return and hold its sway in India. The wheel of

time will thus go on revolving. Then the *Sudras* will be recognised as the feet of the *Virat-Purusha*. That is the place where one pays homage and does worship. Falling there alone, you get real *bhakti*; reaching that you get illumination.



TRIVANDRUM, SEPT. 1918.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. III)

JNANA YOGA AND MUKTI

Q: Acharya Sankara says that the world is not real and that it is all a dream. If so, who is the dreamer? How can the dreamer be in bondage and how can he be free from the dream?

A: Sankara's path of Jnana is very difficult to understand. Dreaming or awake, you have the 'l' consciousness. It is never absent. It is the same 'l' that dreams and that awakes. We take the world as real and identify ourselves with it. That causes *samsara* and that is bondage. If, on the other hand, we realise that it is not real, we become free. This is difficult.

Q: How did the knowledge of the Atman arise in India alone?

A: It was not India alone; many other countries had it. But it was very imperfect.

Q: I have heard that it was after Swami Vivekananda went to America that the Westerners began to think about the Atman.

A: Oh! no. There was the enquiry into the Atman even before Swamiji went there. But the enquiry took a different turn after he went there.

DOES DHARMA DECAY ?

Q: Swamiji, is it not possible to establish an undecaying and everlasting Dharma?

A: Dharma never decays, never dies. It is ever pure and eternal.

Decay and destruction come to the channels through which *Dharma* functions. It is through man that the light of *Dharma* shines. Man is always imperfect. For *Dharma* to shine perfectly well at all times, all men must, at all times, be perfect. That can never be.

THE GROSS AND THE SUBTLE

Q: In the Gita, pleasure and pain are likened to heat and cold. Does the comparison hold good?

A: The *Gita* speaks not only of heat and cold and pleasure and pain, but of all pairs of opposites. They do not all relate to the self-same thing. The soul has the internal organ, and the external coverings as its sheaths: the causal, the subtle and the gross bodies. Heat and cold affect the body. Pleasure and pain affect the mind. They affect the sheaths only, not the *Atman*.

O: What is the cause of birth?

A: Desire.

Q: What desire?

A: The desire to be born.

O: Whence have I come?

A: From God.

BIRTH AND ITS CESSATION

Q: But, when I was one with God how could I have had the desire to be born?

A: When you were one with God, there was no 'you'. You had no separate entity. There was neither you nor your desire. The desire then was God's. God desired to be born as you, to manifest Himself as many.

Q: Then how can this birth and death be put an end to?

A: By desire. Desire to be one with God.

Q: We see many scholars quite worldly-minded and sadly wanting in spirituality. Many illiterate people, on the other hand, are found to be highly spiritual.

A: That is no wonder. Scholarship is one thing, spirituality quite another. This *Atman* cannot be attained by erudition. So *sraddha* alone is the means, not scholarship. Look at Sri Ramakrishna. What scholarship had he? He could hardly write his own name in his own language.

Yet, the foremost Pandits of the day humbly sat at his feet and learnt their lessons.

Q: Did not the Hindus, the followers of Sankaracharya, hate Buddhism and drive it out of India?

A: No, never. History does not support your view that persecution by the Hindus or by Sankaracharya drove Buddhism out of the land of its birth. No religion has died, or can ever die on account of persecution by another. If persecution could kill it, the great religion of Christ should have disppeared long ago. What terrible onslaughts have been made on Hinduism? Did it die, or did it grow stronger and mightier?

Q: How did Buddhism disappear from India?

A: Well, a thing grows in a congenial soil. For Buddha's religion, the Indian soil was uncongenial. Buddhism was never driven out. Persecution could have only invigorated it. Emperor Aurangazeb snatched away the sacred threads of the Brahmins and offered them as an oblation to the fire-god. And what was the result? Instead of dying, Hinduism put forth new vigour and stood unconquerable. So, don't believe that Buddhism was driven out. It simply could not grow here.



QUILON, MAY, 1918.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. III)

RELIGION IS ENERGY

Q: Swamiji, some say religion makes a man indolent. Is it true?

A: Not at all.Nothing makes man so energetic and active as religion. The history of any religion will prove it. It is not religion but science that makes us lazy. To go ten miles, we used our legs in old days; now we sit comfortably in a motor car. In the scientifically advanced countries, machines do everything — cooking, serving, sweeping and all. Now, which makes for laziness, religion or science? Religion, to make men

lazy, indeed! It is the store-house of energy and activity. Religion is Life.

Q: Is religion the goal of life or is it only a means to reach the goal?

A: It is neither; it is life itself. To the Hindu, at any rate, religion is life. Religion is to life what light and heat are to fire. Light and heat are not the goal or means of fire. They are of the very nature of fire. To us, life is religion. There can be no life without religion. Do you understand?

Q: Yes, Swamiji. But some of our leaders say that religion is but secondary, even unnecessary.

A: How foolish they are! and how dogmatic! Have they seen life through and through? Yet, to declare like omniscient beings, that religion is unnecessary!

Q: What is the difference between the nirvana of the Buddhists and the moksha of the Hindus?

A: The one is positive, the other is negative. The Hindus posit something about *moksha*, that it is freedom. About *nirvana*, the Buddhists can only say *nethi*, *nethi*, not this, not this, but what is beyond. What the beyond is, they cannot say. Because, there, words do not go, nor the mind. The *Vedantins* accept both the positions.







MAHARAJA'S COLLEGE, TRIVANDRUM, OCT.1918.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. IV)

IMAGE - WORSHIP

Q: Some Hindus worship images. Is it right?

A: It is not some Hindus alone, all religionists are image-worshippers. But the Hindus alone have transcended image - worship. Can any one think of anything without the help of a form? Take Love. The mention of love brings to you the form of one who loves or is loved. Images are the symbols which help us to think of the qualities of God. We cannot move onwards without worshipping images.

Q: What kind of prayer is the best?

A: That in which the tongue is in union with the heart. Sincerity is the

test. Pray for what you desire. If you really feel that desires are bad, pray to God to expel them from your mind. Ordinarily, there cannot be a common prayer. The secret of prayer is the ardent desire to get rid of one's defects.

O: What is Atman. Where is it established?

A: Atman is indefinable. It is Itself. It is established in Itself. All that we see are its manifestations.

Q: Who are Mahatmas? Does Swamiji believe in their existence?

A: Yes. Mahatmas are great men, men of spiritual illumination. They are also human beings and not beings descended from heaven. Rama, Krishna, Sankara and others were Mahatmas.

O: Does Hinduism believe in fate?

A: Hinduism believes in karma, not in fate or predestination.

Q: Does God want our offerings?

A: God does not want them . We offer them because of our love to God. If we love, we offer a part at least of the good things to our beloved. That is human nature.

Q: Does the present system of education affect the Hindhu Dharma?

A: It affects all Dharmas. In America, no educated person goes to the Church. The church - goers are illiterate classes .

Q: What is the basis of the theory of re-incarnation?

A: The law of cause and effect . Variety in the world proves it.



HARIPAD ASHRAMA, OCT. 1918.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. IV)

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Q: What do the Hindu shastras say regarding the state of the soul after death?

A: The virtuous go to the world of the sun, moon or Brahma according to their merits. Those intenseley attached to sense - objects become bhutas, pretas, pisachas and suffer. Even those who reach the punyalokas come down after enjoying the fruits of their punya. And they again engage themselves in work. Thus, they go round the wheel of Karma and suffer birth and death. But when the jiva comes to realise that the celestial worlds also are transient, then it tries to get out of the wheel and to reach God. Once reaching God, there is no return. Mamupetya tu Kaunteya, punarjanma na vidyate (Reaching me, O, Son of Kunti there is no rebirth). This is the view of the Hindu shastras.

IMAGE AND GOD

Q: How is it that the Christians ridicule the worship of forms?

A: A little thought will convince you that it is opposed to reason. Their Bible itself says: 'Man was created in the Image of God'. If God were formless, his creature, man, would also have been formless. So, on the authority of their scripture, we see that their contention is absurd.

Q: How can God be reached?

A: Close your eyes and walk straight on and you will reach Him. That is to say, restrain the outgoing senses, turn the mind inward and concentrate it on God. Then you will get Him.

Q: Till what stage should we continue worship?

A: Till we become God. Till what stage should a man serve? Till he becomes a master himself. Till what stage does a river flow? Till it reaches the ocean. Similarly, we should go on worshipping God till we become one with Him. When we become God, whom will we worship?



ALLEPPEY, 31ST OCT.1933

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XIX, PAGE - 31)

Q: Are the westerners giving up religion?

A: It is mainly the Russian Bolsheviks that attempt it. But, can

religion be discarded for ever? The central idea of Bolshevism is equality and people's rule. How long will equality last? The Self will gradually creep in and assert itself, and then the system will go to pieces. Equality is in theory only. The very essence of creation is variety. The moment you begin to create, you make differentiation. The moment differentiation ceases, death appears. All the same, the manifoldness in nature rests upon a unity. The Seers have seen it, they recognise it.

INEQUALITY IS NATURAL EVERYWHERE.

Q: What about the Harijan movement, Swamiji ?.

A: Caste distinction, there is everywhere in the world. In England, the Lords form one class, and the Commoners another. No Lord will give his daughter in marriage to a Commoner. Even in the American society, you actually see well-marked distinctions; the professors, the merchants and the millionaires form separate groups. Whether the basis be caste or class or wealth or culture, distinctions and gradations, there are in society, all the world over; that is natural.

Look at our own country; how new classes or castes are springing up even here! I had an occasion to visit a temple which was under the control of Narayana Guru. With a Tiyya friend, I went there; the priest began to distribute *prasada*, given into the hands of the leaders of society. For others, it was thrown on the stone-pavement. Pulayas and other lower classes were not admitted into the temple. It was all a true copy of the procedure of the Brahmin-ridden temples in Kerala. As years roll on, these priests will claim Brahminhood for themselves.

Among the Harijans, those who get a lift will try to form a class of their own. Eventually, they will repudiate their origin and trace their descent from a higher class. Castes or classes will always exist, their forms may change from time to time, but remain they will. But, this untouchability and unapproachability were unknown. The Harijan movement will do some good. It will sweep away stubborn prejudices and pave the way for the progress of all classes and castes!

Q: The Buddhist monks who visited India recently have stated that the whole world will shortly become Buddhistic. Will it be so?

A: Every missionary thinks highly of his mission. Did not the Christian Missionaries once proclaim that the world was about to become Christians! Does it look like it now? And where is Buddha's religion, the

philosophy that he taught? Is his religion practised at all? Buddha's ideal and Buddha's life are nowhere. How, then, can that religion have life and energy to spread.

HARIPAD, NOV. 1923.

VALSALYA BHAKTI

Q: What is the present condition of Vraja?

A: It remains as it was. The people of Vraja have no present-day education. Their God is baby Krishna. Their worship is unique. They do not think of Krishna as God. To them, Krishna is just a child whom they love with all their heart and soul. They do not pray to him for anything. They will take up misery on themselves, but let Krishna be perfectly happy; May he be blessed – that is their prayer. And they bless him!

When they prepare sweetmeats, they first reserve a portion of it for baby Krishna. He is their child, their love, their all - in - all. There is not a trace of selfishness in their devotion to Krishna. It is *Vatsalya bhakti*. Ordinary *bhakti* is shop-keeping. We want this thing; in return we shall make that offering. But the love of the Gopis for Krishna was perfectly pure and unselfish. It was divine. The people of Vraja are mostly poor; wealthy pilgrims give them something.

BABY CHRIST

Q: May we not also take up that highest aspect of love of the Vraja people ?

A: Oh, no! It is so hard to get. Simply to profess it is very bad. It is as a result of great *punya* that one gets *Vatsalya bhakti*. Are we anywhere near it? Ordinarily, the Christians think of Christ as an august personality, as crucified and as a man of sorrows. In Rome, however, it is the Baby Christ with the Madonna that is worshipped. Bambino is the name they have given to Christ. Bambino means a baby. Bambino has many churches built for him. Devotees going there do not kneel or pray. They offer cakes and other sweet things to their Bambino, pray for his happiness, and they bless him.

FALL OF THE MUTTS

Q: Mutts or ashramas for sanyasins degenerated in the Buddhistic

age. What steps are proposed to prevent such a fate overtaking Swamiji's Mutts?

A: Do Mutts degenerate or is it the inmates of the Mutt that degenerate? The question, therefore, is, how I propose to keep the inmates of the Mutts from falling. Well, just consider where those inmates come from. They don't descend from the sky, nor do they sprout up from the earth. They are begotten by you, the householders. If you are Vyasas, they will be Sukas. But, far from being Vyasas, the present day *grihastas* are slaves of *Kamakanchana*. How can you expect Sukalike sons to spring from their loins?

And, what is more, you reserve your intelligent, good - natured and clever sons for Government service. Even if they are so inclined, you will never permit them to become *sanyasins*. The good-for-nothings you may consent to go to some Mutt. And, then, what do you exepect of them? Perfection! Is it reasonable? You give a pie and in return you want a lakh of rupees' worth of things. So, it lies with you to see that the inmates of Mutts do not fall below your ideal. You should be like Vyasa. You should become ideal householders and give well-qualified sons to the Ashramas.

SRISHTI IS PROJECTION

Q: What is the object of creation?

A: The word creation has no equivalent in Sanskrit. It orginated from Christianity: God created Adam. The question arises, out of what? But our shastras call it Srishti-projection, throwing out what was insidemainfesting what was latent. Our shastras say that srishti is beginningless. How can we speak of the purpose of a beginningless thing? A light is burning. If you ask what purpose the light has, the only possible answer is that it is its nature to become manifest.

OTTAPALAM, 23 AUG. 1935.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XX)

KRISHNA'S ADVENT - SYMBOLIC

The puranas usually describe the time of the advent of Divine personages into this world as exceptionally peaceful. But Krishna's was different. So also were the place and circumstances of his birth; he was born in a prison, at midnight and nature was in commotion. There was thunder and lightning, wind and rain, and rivers were flooded. Why was it so? It was symbolic of the times, a reflection of the troubled condition of that age. All phases of life were affected. Spirituality had declined. In the world of thought and philosophy, various schools were warring with one another.

HIS MISSION

Society, too, had its own problems. *Tamas* in various forms was on the war-path. *Satwa* and *Rajas* were on the defensive. At such a time came Krishna to set matters right. To dispel darkness, to restore peace and harmony and to establish *Dharma* was the object of Krishna's *avatara*. Right from infancy to the very day of his ascension, he was ever busy with his work.

RAMA: THE IDEAL MAN

Rama's objects were not so varied. His field of operation was not so extensive. Expression of perfect manhood was his main work. He set before the world the ideal for man in all his relations—as a son, a brother, a husband, a friend, a master and a king. In both these ages, we find men who never swerved from the path of *Dharma*, who held fast to the lotus feet of the Lord in weal and in woe. They did not care for sense-pleasures. If I offer this to Guruvayurappan, I shall get that benefit! Can a devotee calculate like that and act accordingly? Never! Calculation is not in his nature. He loves God, has the bliss of love in his heart; he can seek nothing else. You have heard of Sri Ramakrishna's story of the born agriculturist. The crops may fail him, but he will not give up his profession. He knows and thinks of nothing else.

ADHERENCE TO DHARMA

Such is a born devotee. Such were the Pandavas. What troubles and hardships they underwent, and how long! Yet, never once did they waver or lose their devotion. Their mother went her way. Krishna also left the world. Then the Pandavas thought, 'We fought and won mainly for our mother's sake. She has left us. Our beloved Lord also has departed. Why do we now want all this?' So, spurning an empire, its pleasures and its glory, they set out on *Mahaprasthana*. To the onlookers, it may appear as wonderful renunciation. But to them, it was nothing uncommon or difficult. This is *bhakti*. That nature is not easy to acquire.

TRUE BHAKTI

God alone will become our goal and then we become natural devotees. Bharata could have legitimately ruled the land and enjoyed all royal pleasures. Rama had even asked him to do so. But no, not enjoyment but service was Bharata's ideal. If I am not so fortunate as to serve Rama in person as Lakshmana is, I shall instal his sandals on the throne and be his humble servant! So thought Bharata, and for fourteen long years, he lived a stern, ascetic life in the midst of royal luxuries. That is natural bhakti. Blessed are they who succeed in getting it.

(To a disciple) I am saying all this in answer to your letter. Do you understand? You complain that you alone have no progress while all the others are coming up. This is a never- ending complaint. If you feel that your devotion to God does not bring you any good, why don't you give it up? There can be no hypocrisy in religion, no calculation in it. If you really think that it is profitless, better take up some lucrative work.

TRUE DEVOTEE

There was a King who established an asylum for the disabled. Large numbers flocked to it, for it was a happy life that they led. The inmates grew lazy and pretended to be weak and disabled. The king heard of this. He ordered the building to be set fire to. Most of them got up, though very reluctantly, and rushed out for their very lives. Only two really disabled persons remained. They could not really move out. So the king had them removed to a place of safety. Much in the same way, the true devotee sticks to his *Ishtam* even when his life is in danger. The others

rush out of the asylum of religion when things take a bad turn and roam at will in Samsara.

When a man is perfectly happy, when his cup of pleasures is full to the brim, there comes a sudden, dashing blow. His nearest and dearest are snatched away from him in the twinkling of an eye. The whole scene changes. Optimism gives way to pessimism. But one such hard blow does not awaken man. So, Nature gives him another small dose of pleasure. He drinks it eagerly, forgets the dark past and begins to be optimistic again. This trick is repeated times without number. Gradually, man opens his eye to the reality. He sees that it was a child's play that he was engaged in all the time and that he must strive to reach his goal. He begins his march towards it. He has his gaze fixed and he marches steadily onwards. Real freedom is in the spirit only. There alone we can have eternal peace and bliss. That is our goal, and that is God.



OTTAPALAM, 24TH AUG.1935.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XX)

REAL PENANCE

Q: What is tapasya?

A: People, in general, consider mortification of the flesh as *tapasya*. Some people stand holding up one hand for a number of days. Others stand upon one leg for days together. Such *tamasic tapas* is undertaken to secure some worldly benefit. But real *tapasya* is controlling the body, the senses and the mind and directing the self-controlled mind towards God.

Q: In which aspect should one think of God?

A: Infinite are the aspects of God. You may choose any aspect you like. A man may touch my hand or my feet or my head. Whichever part of the body he touches, he touches me. In Bengal, they sell dolls made of sugar. One boy eats its head, another bites its foot. It is all sugar

and nothing but sugar. So is God – all Bliss. To taste the doll, you have to begin with any one particular part of it. Similarly you have to take up any one aspect of God. Choose what appeals to you most.

Q: If all this is God, what is there to be renounced?

A: You do not seem to understand what renunciation really means. It is not a deliberate giving up. In the act of your taking up a thing, a less valuable thing is naturally passed over. A *sanyasin* selects what he knows to be more valuable. He begins to feel that the whole world is his home, that all men are fathers and all women mothers to him. The small drops off as the bigger comes in. If you do really see and feel all this as God, you have nothing to renounce. Until then, to say that all this is God, is mere vain talk.



TRIVANDRUM, APRIL, 1922

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. VII)

RENUNCIATION AND SERVICE, IDEALS OF ALL AGES

Brahmacharin of the Trivandrum ashrama asked Swamiji:

Q: Are renunciation and service the ideals of this age?

A: Why of this age alone? In all ages, they have been the ideals. The Christians say that these have come down from their religion. That is not so. Christianity got them from Buddhism; Buddha got them from the Upanishads.

Q: Are the teachings of the Gita to be followed by all?

A: The Gita contains teachings for all. But each one should follow the teaching suited to his station in life.

Q: Should sanyasins perform work?

A: They may or may not, as they please. But if they work, it should be as nishkama.

ASRAYA DOSHA

Q: How does Asraya dosha affect the recipient?

A: The shastras say that acceptance of gifts from bad people does harm to the acceptor .The receiver of stolen property is punished. Food touched by a person having a contagious disease transmits the germs of the disease to the person eating that food. Much the same way, the germs of a sinner are conveyed through his gift.

RAMAKRISHNA'S PRACTICE

Q: Sri Ramakrishna, it is said, could not accept food and gifts offered by some. How can it be explained?

A: I can't say how it can be explained. He himself could not account for it. He did not label men as good or bad. He simply could not accept food touched by people whom we call bad. Something within forbade him from accepting it; that is all he knew, not the why of it. All such offerings. he used to give to Swami Vivekananda. Once, Swami Brahmananda tasted a bit and he lost all peace of mind. For Sadhakas, Rakhal Maharaj is the example, not Swamiji. A Sadhaka should observe these rules. If Sadhakas disregard these rules and regulations, they are liable to fall.

Q: Is meditation not possible without repetition of Mantra?

A: Can you meditate without an idea? Can there be an idea without a word to represent it? So, the word has to be present along with meditation. Patanjali advises: Repetition of the mantra and meditation on its meaning.

Q: Will not the word slip away when the meaning is meditated upon?

A: No. Japa is necessary, whatever be the path you follow. Continuous Japa brings up the meaning in the mind. That is why Japa is taught to be practised from boyhood. This method was discovered by our Rishis of old. It is a great help. Worship, Japa, etc., should be practised at least thrice a day during the three Sandhyas. That has a meaning. We derive our being from God, we live in God, and we return to God. So, at sunrise, mid-day and sunset we join our mind to God.







MAHE, AUGUST, 1923.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. VIII, PAGE- 314.)

THE YUGAVATARA

Every Incarnation fulfils the previous ones, never destroys them. *Avataras* in each *yuga* supplies the needs of the times. By following them alone can the people of the *yuga* easily cross the ocean of *samsara*.

Sri Ramakrishna came to supply the wants of the present age. He came for the whole world. Buddha reached the outside world two centuries after his *nirvana*. But within eight years of Sri Ramakrishna's *samadhi*, he had numerous followers in the west. It was there that the message was first proclaimed by Swami Vivekananda.

Ramakrishna came to establish a spiritual empire. Those who have eyes will see. To know him, one has to pray; it is, indeed, very difficult. We ourselves knew very little about him at that time. He realised the infinite and then taught the world, himself remaining on the threshold of the Infinite. He was the fulfilment of all the previous *Avataras*. Those who knew him, therefore, knew all those *Avataras*. He is the *Yugavatara*. Pray to him to reveal to you the *secrets* of all *shastras*. Make hay while the sun shines .

REBIRTH

Q: Swamiji, is rebirth a fact ?

A: Why should you know that ? Think of this life. Thought about rebirth is something like a trader's calculation of loss and gain: shall I get punished hereafter? What good shall I reap? Such people can never have unselfish love. They cannot even love God without an eye to their own profit. Seekers after knowledge of re-birth are like the trader in Ramakrishna's story, and a true *Bhakta* is like the farmer. A born cultivator never exchanges his profession for another, whether the cultivation fails or not. It is really the faithless ones that probe these questions of rebirth and *karma*.

FAITH IN GOD

God is my Mother and I am the Mother's child. Have faith in God. Crying and weeping do not befit us. Struggle and fight, that is the way. I may have many shortcomings. Yet, am I not God's child? I have every right to use force with Him. He is my Mother. If I use force with her, she may give me two slaps. But she is my mother and I love her. God is with you, nearest to you. There is none else so near to you. "Tadantarasya Sarvasysa"—it is inside of everything. One should have faith. Heaven or hell where can God go? It is within us. Ramakrishna has said that we are in hell when we have evil thoughts and that we are in heaven when we have noble thoughts. So heaven, hell, re-birth and all are the results of one's thoughts. If we think of God always, we are in eternal Heaven.



HARIPAD ASHRAMA, MARCH 1927

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XII)

MAN'S REALITY

Q: Is anything possible for man without God's help?

A: You should first of all know what man is. He is a mixture of animal and God. No man is ever content with sense - gratification alone. He desires and tries to get some higher enjoyment. That which urges man to seek that higher enjoyment is his inherent divinity. Whatever drags down man for the gratification of the senses is bestiality. Animals have no *mukti* and hence it is that wise men discard sense-pleasures and seek *mukti*. The more we submit to our inherent divinity, the more we are successful. But success makes man forget the divinity that was the real cause of the success. Therefore, one should try to awaken the latent Divinity and root out the animality. This is the way to progress.

GOD IS ALL-SOURCE

Q: How is it that God is praised for good results but is not blamed for bad ones?

A: Either say that God causes both good and evil,or say that you yourself are responsible for both. If you believe that God brings about both, you will go beyond the pair of opposites, beyond both pleasure and pain. God is like a great reservoir of water. There are many pipes connected with the reservoir. The pipes imagine that they are gving out water and forget that they are unable to give even a drop the moment their connection with the reservoir is severed. Our power, success and goodness are derived from God.



OTTAPALAM, MARCH, 1927 (FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XII)

Q: What is limited by space must be limited by time, says Swami Vivekananda. How is this?

A: Limited is limited all round. Time, space and causation are interdependent. So, what is limited by one of them must be limited by the others also.

Q: What is an Avatara?

A: 'Jaata Iva' (as one born). That is what Acharya Sankara says of Krishna in his Gita-Bhashya. As a matter of fact Brahman alone is real. So, according to Vedanta, Iswara or Brahman does not incarnate Himself. It is the Adhikarika Purushas (Lords of cycles) that incarnate. Each Kalpa has its Adhikarika Purusha. He comes down at the proper time and place. All Avataras are of one and the same being.

Q: What is meant by krama-mukti and sadyo-mukti?

A: Vedanta admits the two forms. Those sanyasins who have attained Brahmajnana attain Mukti here in this life sadyo-mukti. But, those who fall short to attain it and yet, are out-and-out satwic, attain the world of Brahma and attain Mukti along with Brahma after getting Brahmanjana (krama-mukti).

Q: Can the Devas be seen?

A: Yes. Although they have only subtle bodies, they can assume gross forms, materialise them. Their materialised forms are effulgent. They are visible only, not tangible. For the *Devas* to be perfectly visible, they must incarnate.

Q: Do they also incarnate, besides Iswara?

A: Yes. They also incarnate.

Q: Are the other worlds material ones, like Mars?

A: No, they are planes of existence.



CALICUT, NOV. 1928.

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XIV)

INITIATION

Q: How is Initiation given in the Order of Ramakrishna?

A: In that Order, there is no stereotyped method, no hard and fast rule, as in the other Orders in India. Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna was an expert physician in the spiritual realm. He could know the tendencies and *samskaras* of each particular aspirant and he could treat each one as best suited his case. The *mantras* and injunctions he gave to different disciples were therefore different. To initiate each one according to his own character, temperament and *samskara* is the special feature of the Ramakrishna Order. In this respect, Sri Ramakrishna taught his disciples to follow his method and they are doing so.

PRANAYAMA

Q: What sort of Pranaayama forms part of the Rajayoga practice?

A: There is a very subtle force which controls the modifications of the mind and the movements of the life-cells. The control of that force is the *Rajayoga-Pranayama*. Its method is to be learnt from a *guru*; it can't be preached broadcast. Sri Ramakrishna had real *siddhi* in *Pranayama*. To

test it, some sugar was put into his mouth. It was kept there for a long time. Yet, there was no saliva in the mouth; the sugar did not get wet.

Q: How to get bhakti?

A: The real nature of bhakti is love. This love is natural and not the result of any karma. But the ordinary man misuses this inborn love. If it has God as its object, it is called bhakti and its effect is constant bliss. There are certain factors which help this love to express itself as bhakti. Selfless work done as service to God purifies the mind. As the mind gets purified, it will turn god-ward. Renunciation of sense-pleasures is another. Another factor is the company of real devotees. This is,in fact,the most important. The company of real devotees helps to generate bhakti even in thoroughly worldly people. The same love which was formerly expressing itself as attachment to worldy things, now, shines as bhakti. Parabhakti is most difficult to get. It is only when the jiva sees the form of the Lord which is Beauty and Bliss embodied, when the love is for love's own sake, that one gets Para-bhakti. It is rarer than Jnana.



OTTAPALAM, 16TH SEPT. 1929

(FROM PRABUDDHA KERALAM, VOL. XVIII)

VEDANTA

Q: What is Vedanta?

Swamiji:- Vedanta is knowledge of *Brahman*. A knower of *Brahman* becomes *Brahman* Itself. That is the *Sruti*. *Brahman* and *Brahmajnanin* are one. *Sruti* is the teachings of such *Brahmajnanins*. They alone have the right to be religious teachers. *Guru* and Vedanta are the same. They alone can bring to light the secret of *dharma*. The others are mere scholars, learned in *shastras*. When that beginningless *dharma* disappers, *avataras* come and rehabilitate it. Teachers of the beginningless knowledge are *Saguna* Brahman. They disclose the *Nirguna* state. But for them, how can man grasp the truth concerning *dharma*? Pandits cannot teach it.

SWAMI TURIYANANDA HALL: SRI RAMAKRISHNA SEVASHRAMA, BENARES, 25TH FEB.1928

(FROM NOTES TAKEN DOWN BY ONE PRESENT ON THE OCCASION)

wami Nirmalanandaji is seated in the hall. Bimal and I went over there, prostrated and sat down. Gradually, Jogin, Jagadananda, Gurudas, Heerananda, Moti and HariDas came in, prostrated and seated themselves in the hall.

Swami Nirmalanandaji said that he was brought up in Benares during his early years. Then R—asked:

Q: If so,how did you get the opportunity to meet Sri Ramakrishna or Swami Vivekananda?

A: It was to Sri Ramakrishna that I went first, and not to Swami Vivekananda. I was not even acquainted with the latter at that time.

FABLES ABOUT DISCIPLES

In the course of the conversation the Swamiji spoke as follows:-

There is a movement now-a-days to make a classification in this manner: So and so is a two-anna disciple; so and so four-annas, and so on. Wherefrom did these people know all this? We are still living. They are introducing all such fables. Again, we find in many modern books such statements as the following, "Sri Ramakrishna himself gave sanyasa to so and so and not to so and so". Do you know the real fact? After the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda took me from my house to the Mutt. After a few days' coming and going Swamiji said "Where would you go? Stay here". From that time, I lived in the Baranagore Mutt. Then, one day, Swamiji selected the mantras necessary for taking sanyas from the Mahanirvana Tantra and gave sanyas to all of us. Swamiji gave us the sanyasin names. He named Sashi, Ramakrishnananda and said, "I myself wanted to have this name. Well, let Sashi have it .For no one has served the Master like him".

SWAMIJI IS GURU MAHARAJ

Q: When did Swami Vivekananda take sanyas?

A: Whatever he had to do had already been done for him by Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji himself has told me, 'See, a ghost has entered inside me, the same that was in Sri Ramakrishna...It does not leave me it does not give me a moment of rest'. Getting a little of this *shakti*, Abhedanandaji has been able to accomplish so much. They are Shivas-Gods who have descended here taking human bodies.

One day, while in Madras, Maharaj got angry and did not talk for some hours with Ramakrishnanandaji. The latter became restless, fell at his feet and declared: 'Are you angry with me? If you pass water, lakhs and lakhs like myself will be created at once, See what faith! You say that we are all equals, his co-disciples, brothers, is it not so? Did Saradanandaji ever think in that way? How much of devotion and faith he had towards them?' These are all the disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. That *shakti* which was in Swamiji went over afterwards to Maharaj, Premanandaji etc., and worked wonders.

ISWARAKOTIS

Q: Is then the classification into Jivakoti, Iswarakoti etc., mere fancy?

A: No. Sri Ramakrishna Himself has said that four were *Iswarakotis*. Swamiji's case is different. Sri Ramakrishna did not place him in any particular class. The Master used to say: 'I have brought him from Kasi'. How many things have the Master told us about Swamiji and the Master has forbidden us from telling them to Swamiji. After Swamiji's return from America, Yogananda told something, hearing which Swamiji began to weep and he became restless. He wanted to give up his body. Then Maharaj patted him on the back and comforted him. Maharaj was very angry with Yoganandaji and rebuked him. Swamiji was not included in any class by Sri Ramakrishna. So, leaving apart the case of Swamiji, these four, viz., Yogananda, Niranjanananda, Brahmananda and Premananda were classed as *Iswarakotis* by the Master.

GODS COME TO EARTH

About Maharaj he had told us, 'Krishna on the Lotus etc'. Though we had not mentioned this to Maharaj,he himself said about 'Krishna on the lotus etc.' during his last days. Oh! they are all Gods who have come down to the earth taking human bodies. You are under the impression that Swami Premanandaji had no disciples. But,I know that he had three or four initiated disciples. Yogananda Swami also had a few disciples. Do these facts find a place in your books?

SWAMIJI UNDERSTOOD GURU MAHARAJ

When Swami Vivekananda gathered us together at the Baranagore Mutt, these very people began to raise a hue and cry that Norendra, was spreading his own doctrines and creating a different sect of his own, as if these people had understood everything of Sri Ramakrishna! To try to understand the Great Master without understanding Swamiji is in vain. Swamiji alone understood Sri Ramakrishna fully and he made us clearly grasp as much as we were capable of receiving. Swamiji, a veritable Sankara, received in his head the Ganges of knowledge and gave it freely to others. At times, Maharaj would be speechless and filled with emotion touching Swamiji. Maharaj would feel as if he were touching the Great Master. Swamiji would then say, 'Come Rakhal, come', pat his back and comfort him so that he may regain his normal state.

TRUTH ABOUT GIVING KAASHAYA

How many stories are being heard of the giving of the kaashaya. It is said that Sri Ramakrishna gave to certain persons the gerua cloth. But it is not true. Well, what is the real fact? Gopal Senior [Advaitananda Swami] clad himself in the gerua clothes and came to Sri Ramakrishna. He had brought some more gerua clothes. Seeing that, Sri Ramakrishna told him: These are boys with suddha-satva. Give them these clothes'. Accordingly, Gopaladada gave us these gerua clothes. This is the real story. See, how much it has been exaggerated.

LISTEN TO TEACHINGS

At one time, Sri Ramakrishna performed the puja for our sake at Cossipore and gave us the prasad of Kali Puja. Saradanandaji was not there at that time. When he came the next day, he was given the prasad. But all those are personal matters. Try to understand and reflect in your life what they have taught you. In time, you will be able to know everything by His grace. In my own case, the older I grow, the more I am able to appreciate His words by His grace.

RAMAKRISHNA FOR HUMANITY

- Q: What is the meaning of Sri Ramakrishna's saying, 'those who go over here will have no more birth'?
 - A: The meaning is that those who will accept his ideal will have no

more rebirth. You have an idea that when Purna came to the Master, the list of those who were to go to Him had become complete. Is it so? Did Sri Ramakrishna incarnate only for a few such individuals? What was the necessity for an *Avatar* just for a few persons? He came for the sake of all humanity, for the whole universe, especially for the good of India. Mathur Babu once told Sri Ramakrishna 'Sire, many *Bhaktas* will come to you hereafter, is it not so?' When will they come? If they were to come now, I could be very happy with them. 'Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'How can they come all at once now? Some of them are just learning to walk, some are walking on all fours, some are in the womb and some have not yet taken birth.'

KESHAB'S DEVOTION

Sri Ramakrishna told Keshab Chandra Sen about Swamiji: 'See, Keshab, you have got one power which has made you so much respected and honoured by the world. But Noren has got eighteen such powers.' Where was the world-famous Keshab and where was the college boy, Norendranath! And what are we witnessing now? Every word of His has come out to be literally true. And what faith and devotion Keshab Chandra Sen had towards Sri Ramakrishna! Whatever the Master said was listened to with great attention by Keshab, whereas Vijaya Krishna Goswami and others used to discuss with Him.

RAMAKRISHNA, WORSHIPPED EVERYWHERE

When Sri Ramakrishna was in the state of *samadhi*, his photo was taken in haste. Many days later, it was printed and a copy shown to Him. He was very much delighted at seeing the same and said: where did you get this? Bring some flowers and sandal. Mother is inside this photo. She herself has come and taken Her abode herein.' Saying thus, He worshipped the photo with flowers, sandal etc., and said, 'this picture will be worshipped in many houses hereafter'. What do we see now? Can His words be untrue? Every word has been proved to be true.

I shall tell you of my experience in the South, in a village in the interior part. I went to a temple there. Besides the images of Shiva, Vishnu, and other Gods, a photo of our Master was also there. The people of the place did not know that I belonged to the Ramakrishna Mission. I asked them whose is this photo?' They said that it was Perumalswamy, meaning Bhagavan. Just think of it !Every word of His has come out true. Believe; by belief one can realise God. He is very remote from arguments.

SAVING EVEN SINNERS

Remember His words . Those who come here are very fortunate. They will have no more re-birth. That is ,those who accept His new *bhava* (this ideal of His) will have no further re-incarnation. It is indeed your great good fortune that you have come here, within the sphere of His influence, His ideals. He has unbounded mercy on you. Do not think that because a person seems to be a sinner in our eyes, the grace of God is not on him. He has taken the human body on account of His grace towards us. The sinner also will certainly get *mukti*. These are His very words. However sinful a man may appear to us, if he but once comes within the sphere of His influence, he will have no more re-birth. Swamiji has said: The Lord has not yet given up His subtle body. People are able to see Him even now'. Believe in these words of Swamiji, try to understand them and you will realise.

WIN GOD'S GRACE

Q: Swamiji, Sri Ramakrishna used to say: 'The wind of His Grace is ever blowing. Unfold your sail'. What is the meaning of this?

A: "Do something and try to get within the range of the wind of His Grace. Afterwards, you will not have to exert yourself in anyway. Have you not seen the boatmen bring the boat to the Ganges with great labour, raise the sai and then take rest? The boat goes on under the favourable wind. So also we have to work hard, advance somehow or other in the beginning. But when once we are within His Grace, everything will be accomplished by itself. Then you need not work so hard.

HIS INFINITE GRACE

Also, is there any limit to His Grace? Do you not see your Latu Maharaj (Swami Adbhutananda)? What was he to start with? He was but a shepherd of Chapra. He came to Calcutta in search of a job. Ramachandra Dutt made him his peon. Afterwards, he was employed to do services to Sri Ramakrishna. But what a wonderful transformation! Sri Ramakrishna made him the great Swami Adbhutanandaji. What a contrast between the illiterate shepherd of Chapra and the *siddha*, Swami Adbhutanandaji! What infinite grace!

(That very night at 6-30 p.m.)

Q: Can one who is not an Iswarakoti incarnate with an Avatara?

A: Yes, such a one can incarnate along with an Avatara.

Q: How can those merged with the Lord, return?

A: They have the desire to partake in the *lila* of the Lord. So they do not merge completely. Have you not heard of *salokya*, *sarupya*, and other different kinds of *mukti*? Though they are immersed in the ocean of *Satchidananda*, they wish to play with the Lord, and so they take up a human body and incarnate.

Q: In the case of jivas like ourselves, those who have got grace, initiation etc., from revered souls like you, if we die before getting realisation, what will be our state?

A: You will get *mukti*. Otherwise His words will be untrue. Can they ever be untrue? At the last moment, at least, you will certainly get realisation.



OTTAPALAM, 24TH NOV. 1923. (NOTES TAKEN BY SWAMI AMALANANDAJI.)

DO HIS WORK

wamiji said:- Sri Ramakrishna is Mother Divine. We are His children. The Mother knows the wants of Her children. You need not ask for anything. Sri Gurumaharaj cooked rice and very nice things and we are invited to partake of them. We have simply to fall to. There is no need of tapasya or meditation. Have faith in Him, the faith of Nachiketas, the faith that will move mountains from your path. He and His cause are one. Work for His cause with your whole heart and soul. Our energy is to be used for that. He has the key of the chest of realisation in His hands. He wanted Swami Vivekananda to do His work. After the work was finished, Swamiji realised the Highest and went into samadhi. The key is handed over to His children for the good of humanity.

OBEY THE COMMANDER

Sri Gurumaharaj is the Commissioner and Swamiji is His Chief Assistant. We are His constables. Obey the commander-in-Chief. Why should you know his plans? The soldier's interest in his wife and children and others will be taken care of by the Commander. Let our body, mind and soul be our Commander's. Swami Vivekananda is the Commanderin-Chief, Lord Subrahmania. Obey Him and success will be yours. No use of ochre robe or Swami or Ananda without faith.

RAMAKRISHNA MISSION

Sri Gurumaharaj is no form or person, but a principle, the same principle that manifested as Rama and Krishna. You may question the historicity of Rama and Krishna but not of Ramakrishna. The form of Rama or Krishna is not suited to this time to effect the spiritual conquest of the world. Hence the principle manifested itself in the form of Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna came to vitalise all forms, the old as well as the new. He came to prove that the essence of all the Vedas, Puranas and Upanishads is true, that all religions are true. These are His words.

Sri Ramakrishna is Sri Ramakrishna. A flash will come and then you will understand. Now, have faith in what I say and every thing will come. You have renounced everything and surrendered at His feet. You have insured your life. It is safe in His hands. He is the uncle moon of all, from the Brahmin to the Chandala. Sincerity, purity of character-these are the foundation on which you have to build. Untiring work is the brick, patience is the cement.

THE GITA FOR ALL HUMANITY

Look at Sri Krishna; what an autocrat! Every one should worship Him! Otherwise, there is no salvation! What an autocrat! There is no Committee - Government. But note this, the Gita, the essence of all Upanishads, is meant not for the Brahmins alone, but for all men, down to the lowest Chandalas. He was the perfect autocrat to establish the widest spiritual democracy. The words addressed by Him are meant for all humanity, for the salvation of all. Through them, Vedanta was broadcast to the whole world.

THE GITA MESSAGE AGAIN

Once again it was broadcast to the four corners of the earth from the platform of the Parliament of Religions at Chicago. The modern world

was told in modern words that all religions are true; that truth will be accepted and that truth will triumph in the end. The source from which it emerged may be denied by many. But impartial historians will trace it to the Fire of Spirituality that blazed under the banyan tree at Dakshineswar. Sri Krishna and Ramakrishna are the same. It is not that everyone will worship the photo of Sri Gurumaharai, but every one will ultimately accept the truths that He taught and Swamiji proclaimed.

SPIRITUAL TREASURE - HOUSE

What a marvel was Ramakrishna, what a reservoir of concentrated spirituality, more than enough to deluge the whole world! Bhagavan acquired all that not for Himself but for all the world. What a life-work it was to gather and store so much! Who has done so much before? Bhagavan gave that treasure to Swamiji who in his turn gave it to so many. Through them, the spiritual current will flow to many a parched field and it will go on until the whole store is distributed among all.

In the initial stages of our spiritual life, there is need for a guru. Later on, you will find that the external guru is dispensed with and your consciousness becomes the guru. In the beginning also, it was really your own consciousness that inspired you to approach the external guru. In prayer, there is an outpouring of the heart's desire to your Ishtam and hence it pre-supposes words. Meditation is of two kinds. In one, you meditate upon your Ishtam. In the other, you merge yourself in your Ishtam.







A RENTED ROOM IN THE OFFICE OF THE VEDANTA SOCIETY. MERCARA, COORG.

(EXTRACTS FROM THE NOTES OF SRI K.J. CHENGAPPA)

OFFERING TO GOD

A devotee: Swamiji!is it not wrong to kill animals to propitiate God?

Swamiji:-Why is it wrong?

Devotee: God does not require it. He will not be pleased with it.

Swamiji: Does your God want coconut and plantains? Will He be

pleased with them?

Q: I am pleased with them. It pleases me to offer coconuts and plantains.

A: Similarly, the person who offers animals thinks that his God will be pleased with the animals that he offers. God does not require either his offerings of animals or your offerings of coconuts and plantains. We should not condemn any sincere offerings or religious practice as bad. They do not know a better way. They must be told, 'What you are doing is good and acceptable to God. But there is a better way. It is cheaper and less injurious to life. Your God will be equally pleased with you if you offer coconuts, plantains and other fruits with devotion'. When he is established in that practice, he must be led up, saying, 'God does not require even those fruits. He is the giver of everything. What is there that is not His? He will be fully pleased with you if you simply pray, even mentally, because He is not far away from us. He resides within us, in our hearts'. In this way, he must be led up from where he is standing.

SRI KRISHNA

Q: Sri Krishna, an avatara of God, was stealing butter and having thousands of wives!

A: If you accept Sri Krishna as God, He must be considered above all the vices imputed to Him. If He were a mere human being, would it have been possible for Him to have such a large number of wives? What are we to understand, then? It is that He was a great Yogi, above all sexual impulse. That was why thousands of women were gathering round Him. A woman's highest conception of love is that of a husband. All those women, therefore, out of fulness of love towards God Krishna, conceived Him as their husband, as illustrated by a line in a song in the *Rasaleela*: 'Oh! Krishna! it is not only us that Thou makest happy, but all beings. Thou art also the *Atman* in every being'.

The *Purana* is meant for ill-developed intellects and is therefore couched in the language of the world in order to create interest in the story of the Lord. The *Gopis* considered Him as their husband with whom they could be one. Have you not heard the story that *Devarshi* Narada found that there was none of the thousands of His wives with whom Krishna was not. Is it possible for a human being to be so present with every one of the thousands? He was, therefore, an Incarnation of God and a great Incarnation at that!

PLACE : PONNAMPET

(SWAMIJI WAS SEATED UNDER A PANDAL IN FRONT OF AN OFFICE BUILDING)

THE RELIGION OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Mr. Kushalappa (M.L.C):- What is the difference between Ramakrishnaism and other religions?

A: There is no such thing as Ramakrishnaism. Ramakrishna did not create a sect. He did not teach anything new. He only re-stated Hinduism, the universal religion. The difference between the religion which He lived and taught and the other religions is the difference between the footprint of an elephant and those of the other animals. The footprints of the other animals can be contained in that of the elephant, but the elephant's cannot be contained in those of the others. So, the Vedantic religion taught by Sri Ramakrishna has a place for all the other religions, but the others cannot contain the Vedantic religion commonly called Hinduism.







OTTAPALAM, 5TH MAR. 1938.

NON-RESISTANCE

everal devotees are present. Swamiji spoke as follows:-

Now-a-days, non-resistance is being freely advocated. How many are there competent to practise it? It is only after acquiring full power to resist that one becomes fit to practise non-resistance. Otherwise it will be sheer weakness. The stronger must always be resisted. Towards the weaker, practice non-resistance. In both cases, it is the manifestation of strength – to resist the stronger and not to resist the weaker. The practice now obtaining is the manifestation of weakness, both ways. Strength is what is wanted, what should be infused into the people.

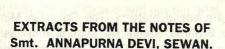
MANIFEST STRENGTH

Biblical religion is being practised in the land of the *Gita*-religion. In the West, Gita-religion is practised. What do our Gods have in their

hands—Shiva, Mother Kali and others? What did Sri Ramachandra have in His hands? What did He do? What did Sri Krishna teach Arjuna when the latter refused to fight? Coming to our own times, Sri Gurumaharaj was once passing through a place infested with dacoits, in a country cart. At the sight of a person appearing, the cartman and others fled.

What did Sri Gurumaharaj do?

He stuck to his place, and on the approach of the dacoit, shouted 'Sri Kali ki Jai' and rushed out of the cart. The dacoit had to flee at that. It was not that Sri Gurumaharaj was physically stronger than the dacoit but he manifested spiritual strength. Do you see the effect of the manifestation of strength? 'Fear r.ɔt' 'ma bhaih', should be our motto. Fear is weakness, a sin. Fearlessness is strength, a virtue, which should be acquired. Non-injury, again, is a misunderstood virtue. People exihibit great scruples in killing flies, mosquitos etc., but have no scruples in fleecing fellow-beings in all ways. We do not show sympathy where it ought to be, but exhibit it where it ought not to be.



Q. I have heard that we should not give up japa with beads but that it should be practised daily.

A: We can give up the mala. But we should not give up japa by the mind.

Q: How should we call upon God?

A: We should take up one *bhava* and call on Him in that *bhava - Dasya*, *Vatsalya*, *Madhura* or any other.

Q: If we cannot do Puja, what should we practise?

A: Japa.

Q: If Japa also cannot be practised?

A: Meditate. *Japa* is greater than *Puja* and meditation greater than *Japa*. Keep your mind under your control.

Q: Many are born to pass away immediately after birth. Why are they born at all?

A: The gardener takes very great care of the plants and trees which have blossomed and begun to bear fruits. He thinks within himself that he will take the fruits to his master as they ripen. But when the master plucks the unripe fruits, the gardener says to himself: 'He has plucked the unripe fruits. Well, the trees are his, it is his will and pleasure'!



TRIVANDRUM, 1926 NOTES TAKEN BY SWAMI SRIKANDHANANDA

Q: Is there any provision for the householders in the Ramakrishna Mission?

A: We give them spiritual instructions.

Q: What I meant was organised form of ceremonials to be followed by householders.

A: No, they are social matters. The Christian Missions, the Arya Samaj, and the Brahmo Samaj lay special emphasis upon rituals, because they are social bodies. Ours is purely a religious organisation.

Q: Are there interpolations in the Christian gospel?

A: Plenty! The various Bibles do not agree with one another. The Greek, Latin and English Bibles differ greatly. The idea of the Trinity was not there till the time of Peter. The Catholics place Mary even above Jesus. The Christians themselves are not agreed as to their tenets. How, then, can we know what the original ones were. The Christians are to be asked to settle that question.

Q: Is there any word corresponding to 'heathen' in the Hindu Religion?

A: No. By the word 'heathen' the Christians meant one who worshipped any but the true God. According to the Hindu religion, there is only one God who is Omnipresent and Omniscient. Hinduism is the only religion which teaches that God is not extra-cosmic, but immanent.

Christianity believes that God rules the world sitting in heaven. It does not believe that God resides in all. They believe in the resurrection of Jesus as well as of the other created beings. They also believe that man will go to God with the same body which he had while on earth. Those who do not subscribe to these ideas are considered heathens.



PLACE: OTTAPALAM

(NOTES TAKEN BY V. RAMAN NAMBUDIRIPAD)

Q: Where is real happiness?

A: In knowledge, renunciation and selfless service. Very few, fortunate people know this truth. When union is the cause of pleasure, separation must cause pain. It must, therefore, be clear that not sense-enjoyment but renunciation and knowledge are the goal of man.

Q: Does it mean that all objects are to be renounced?

A: That is not it. We have to accept many things in life. But we must never forget that they are our means and not our goal. The ideal must be kept high.

Q: How to attain the ideal?

A: To work alone, you have the right. Keep this in mind. The first step towards the goal is *nishkama-karima*. When the mind becomes pure, *sadhana* becomes easy. Then we must practise concentration. Is it easy to control the mind? It is the most elusive thing in the world. Yet, there is nothing which man cannot accomplish by incessant practice. But steady, constant practice is impossible without *Vairagya*.

Q: How can Brahman that is devoid of form or qualities be meditated upon?

A: There in is the necessity of *Bhakti*. Men with body-idea cannot meditate on the *nirguna*. Their path is to surrender everything at the lotus feet of the All-merciful and Blissful Lord.

Q: What is bhakti?

A: There is sadhya bhakti and sadhana bhakti. Sadhya bhakti is the

never-ceasing, continuous flow of all the activities of the mind towards the Lord, the Beloved, of all blessed qualities, the very Soul of our souls. It is pure, unconditioned love, supreme attachment to God. That transcendental love is reached through *sadhana bhakti* which has several steps – *sravana*, *keertana* etc. The next is *smarana*, constant remembrance. That is, in fact, the most important, because that alone leads to *Para bhakti* which may be said to be the highest pinnacle of *Jnana*.

Q: Is it possible to see God by the sense - organs?

A: Yes. In *bhakti*, it is the mental form that is seen outside. When the form is always before the mind, when the mind is centred upon that alone, there is no distinction of inside and outside.

Q: May not the guru's grace alone give realisation to the sadhaka?

A: Yes, but it is very rare. Ordinarily, sadhana is very necessary.

Q: In spite of struggles, the mind refuses to be controlled. What should I do?

A: (Pointing to Swamiji's own heart with great feeling) Fully believe in me.

Q: How can mahapurushas be recognised?

A: In the presence of a *mahapurusha*, we feel an elevation in ourselves. Noble and holy thoughts arise in the mind when we are near them. I still remember the days we used to go to Bhagavan. We were simple students then. But approaching Bhagavan was like entering a higher world.



PONNAMPET, 7TH JUNE 1927 (EXTRACTS FROM THE NOTES OF A DISCIPLE)

EVERY HOME, A TEMPLE

wamiji has gone to open the Ashrama at Ponnampet. In the evening, Swamiji spoke about the work of the Mission in Coorg.

Swamiji:- 'Now, by the grace of Sri Gurumaharaj, there is this Ashrama in Coorg. This can be the chief Ashrama and other smaller ones

can be started in various parts of the district. Thus, the ideas of Sri Gurumaharaj will spread. In course of time, every house will become a temple of Guru Maharaj. I see it is going to take place in the future. These present-day movements such as the Brahmosamaj, Aryasamaj etc. may not last long. But this will, because the Divine power of Sri Gurumaharai is at its back'.

9TH JUNE, 1927.

Q: Swamiji, is it good to let the mind fix itself upon different figures?

A: No. Haven't you heard 'one thing at a time'? Having taken up a figure and realised that, you may take up another. Don't you know how Sri Gurumaharaj practised? He took up one sadhana, realised the ideal, and then took up another.

Q: What are the various forms of sadhana?

A: Sadhana means constant effort to concentrate on one particular object in spite of its unwillingness to do so. The highest form of it is Rajayoga. Its goal is samadhi.

Q: Is pranayama helpful to concentration?

A: Yes, It helps concentration. But it does not give samadhi.

AFTERNOON, 9TH JUNE 1927

SLOW, SILENT WORK

Swamiji: When I first came to Bangalore, there was only that building, no funds, no cook, not even a servant to clean the utensils. Since Sashi Maharaj used to hold classes here and there, I too, had to do so. I would return from the classes at 9 p.m., and then cook my food, sometimes even starving. Then, Mr. Narayana lyengar gave Rs. thirty per month. After some time, he raised it to Rs. forty. I used to go to the market to collect subscriptions in kind and in coins. After much knocking about, I collected Rs. sixthousand and deposited the amount in the bank as a permanent fund. Then I got a cook from the north. He lived with me for six years. Thus the ashrama slowly developed into its present condition. Is it all a joke? So long as President Maharaj was there, I had some interest in Bangalore. The day he passed away, I lost all interest in everything. And what a land is this? Sashi Maharaj wept finding that working so long, he could not get a single man of renunciation.

FAITH IN GURUMAHARAJ

If we are to show anything, it is that we are the children of Sri Gurumaharaj. You hunt after lectures. Even Swamiji did not deliver lectures here except in reply to addresses presented to him. What did President Maharaj do and what did Swami Turiyananda do? Did they lecture? Did they dance on the platform? It is life and character that is wanted. I have faith in Gurumaharaj. If I retain a spark of what I got from Gurumaharaj, people will come and bow down before it. Where do you see a man of sadhananishtha like Swami Turiyananda in the present generation?

This generation wants to captivate the world. It wants dynamic activity, they all talk very much of activities. I travelled over and visited all the ashramas. Advertisement and shop-keeping, that is what I saw. Have faith in Gurumaharaj. An ounce of faith will work wonders. You work for name and fame. You think that will stabilise your work. Poor souls! No faith in Gurumaharaj! Where angels fear to tread! Spirituality is nothing to you. You have crammed something borrowed from Swamiji, what Swamiji gave in plain language and with it you dance on the platforms. Pray to Sri Gurumaharaj to reveal to you what He came to preach. You have read His parable of the lotus and the bee, and yet you want dynamic activities. You think you have got ideas directly from Sri Gurumaharaj! Be like President Maharaj or Swami Turiyananda.

RELIGION WILL SPREAD

After pratishtha and puja in the Ashrama at Ponnampet, Swamiji said:

This is a virgin soil. People have very little religion. Hereafter, all villages will have something like an ashrama or *Bhajana-Sangha* in Coorg. Sri Gurumaharaj is for the high and the low, the rich and the poor alike. He will be worshipped by the orthodox as well as by the heterodox. His work is like *satamooli*, the plant. Once it comes, it spreads. Till now, only the Brahmins had anything of religion. Now, the lower classes also get religion. That is why the orthodox Brahmins are opposed to the Mission. It is not by lectures but by personal talks that ideas spread and people are instructed and influenced. Don't you see in the life of Gurumaharaj, how he visited various persons. Even Swamiji could influence people only by personal contact. People who hear lectures

may praise the lecturer and go away. Meeting persons and giving them ideas personally, is the method of work in India.

HIS GRACE

It is Gurumaharai's grace that has caused this ashrama to come into existence. Through His grace, He has given me some insight which enables me even to smell the places which He likes. Did I not tell you when I first came to Ponnampet? It is not for me that this ashrama has been built. I may stay here for a day or so. It is not my work either. It is His and so the ashrama will go on. He is, by His grace, present here. I have no attachment to these things. It is He who works and none can resist Him.

TELLICHERRY, 13TH JUNE, 1927.

In the morning, after breakfast, Mr. Nambiar requested Swamiji to teach him Vedanta Sutras.

Swamiji: I am the disciple of that man who did not know how to put two words together. How can I teach? The Lord's name is the relief, the refuge. But the mind does not stick to it.

Chaitanya has said: 'Oh Lord, you have created names by thousands and deposited all your might in every one of them. Yet, Oh, Lord! such is my misfortune that I feel no love for any one of them at any time'.

Q: If Chaithanya says that he has no bhakti, what is the hope for us?

A: Not that he had no bhakti, but that he was not satisfied with what he had. Bhaktas are never content with their bhakti. By repeating God's names, you are making your mind a repository of energy for battling with avidya. All animal nature comes and says, 1 will occupy the mind. But the Lord's name drives it away.

Swami A - : Even after attaining Nirvikalpa Samadhi, Swami Vivekananda wanted to accept Pavahri Baba as his guru to teach him Hatha Yoga. How can we explain it?

A: He was to be the world-teacher. So he was expected to know all the prevalent systems of Yoga. He had to know the religious needs of the whole world as he was to be the world-teacher. Don't you see, Sri Gurumaharaj practised the Muhammedan and other faiths after he had attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi. The goal is one, the paths are different; he wanted to test and be familiar with them all. Similarly, Swamiji wanted to practise Hatha Yoga.

TEACHING VEDANTA - ORIGINAL METHOD

Swami A:- What is the practical side of the Jnana Yoga lectures of Swamiii?

A: The practical side is given in his lectures on Practical Vedanta. Swamiji's method was new. Vedanta was in the Upanishads. In the *Vedanta-Sutras* they were systematised in one way. Sankaracharya systematised it in another way as found in *Viveka-Chudamani*, *Atmabodha etc.* Swamiji presented it in a way appealing to the modern mind, explaining it with reference to psychology, science and metaphysics. Sri Ramakrishna did one half and Swamiji did the other half.

Sri Ramakrishna came to appeal to all. That is why He was not learned in the scriptures. He gave a death-blow to the highest authority attributed to the *Shastras*. Sankara had to compromise with the orthodox view. The times perhaps demanded it. But Sri Ramakrishna boldly said that the *Vedas* themselves were only the words of inspired men. That is why Swamiji said that *the Vedas* meant not books, but inspiration.

Sri Ramakrishna taught the masses in simple language. The same ideas were taught by Swamiji in the language of the intelligentsia of the world. Swamiji put new life into everything. So also did Bhagavan.

NEW AUTHORITY

Now, you do not understand Bhagavan or Swamiji. After hundreds of years, every word of theirs will be quoted as authority. Already Bhagavan's words have become so. Formerly, they tried to show that Bhagavan got His ideas from the Brahmos. Now, they have given up the attempt. Instead, they now attack Swamiji saying that this is Swamiji's own idea. As time goes on, they will accept His words as authoritative, as the words of Krishna and Vyasa. Not only that, they will accept the words of all His disciples. Don't you see people saying with regard to the commentaries that Anandagiri's is more authoritative than Vachaspati's because Vachaspati was only a householder and did not belong to the Order of Sankara.

In the evening Mr. Nambiar and a few students came.

SWAMIJI - A YOGI

A Boy:- Some say, Swami Vivekananda was not a true Yogi, because he did preaching work. Is it true?

A: What did he preach?

Boy: He preached religion, about God.

A: How can one who has not trodden the path leading to God preach it to others. Only a *Yogi* can do that. He alone can boldly say: 'Here, I have found the path, I have solved the problem'. Will not people begin to laugh at me if I preach something which I do not know. Did people laugh when Vivekananda preached? That shows that he was a *Yogi*. I have very little respect for those *Yogis* who do not share their knowledge with others.

Q: The point is Trailinga Swami did not preach as Swami Vivekananda did.

A: Why! even in his maunamhe preached. Once there was a naughty problem which the pandits of Benares could not solve. They approached Trailinga Swami who was in mounamthen. He gave them a written reply. I saw him while I was a little boy. Who told you that he did not preach?

Q: Has Swamiji seen any extraordinary man in the Himalayas?

A: No. Extraordinary was Trailinga Swami. He was quite indifferent about food. Some people would worship him. If people placed money before him he would play with it and go away leaving it there. He was just like a child. Once, a Raja put a shawl over him. He wore it and seemed pleased with it. But when it dropped off, he did not even look at it. That was the man, extraordinary!

COMMENTARIES: ANGLES OF VISION

Q: What was the necessity for a commentary on the Gita after Sankara's?

A: Why, Tilak has written one. Necessity for a commentary, there is. It may be asked, why did Krishna come after Rama? In Sankara's time, science had not made much advance. The modern scientific mind wants something more than Sankara's words.

Q: Krishna preached the Gita to express an idea and Sankara has explained the meaning. When the real meaning has been explained, why another explanation?

A: Sankara's meaning applied to men of his age who had one angle of vision.

Q: But the text is the same.

A: The text points to an object. The object may be viewed from different angles. Sankara had one angle of vision. The same *Brahman* is seen from various angles of vision. Sankara's instrument may not hold good in this age. So a new instrument is necessary to view the object which is the text.

Q: Why could He not have created all good?

A: Without bad there is no good. If one thing alone exists, there is no creation. Creation has inequality inherent in it. Then the question is, why God created at all. The shastras say God alone exists, nothing else. I alone exist. I have multiplied myself.

Q: So all are God ?

A: Certainly. But all are not the whole of God. A pie and a rupee are both money. But each has its own value.

Q: Why should then one try to realise God ?

A: If a pie wants to have the value of a rupee, why should it not attempt it? If it is satisfied with its own value, it need not struggle. But if it wants to have a higher value it must struggle.

Q: But, are not all one?

A: All are one in quality (all are money), but different in degree (value).

KARMA

Q: Is pre-destination and karma the same?

A: No. Pre-destination is something happening without a cause, subject to no law. *Karma* is the law of cause and effect.

Q: Can our will modify the effect of karma?

A: Certainly, if I can make, I can unmake also.

Q: Does the effect come naturally from the cause or is there a supernatural agent behind it?

A: Cause produces its effect naturally.

Q: How can karma which has no intelligence produce a result?

A: The lamp burns and darkness vanishes.

Q: How to free oneself from karma?

A: Karma is due to avidya and association with body. Give up that and you will be free through vidya. The fire of knowledge reduces all karma to ashes.



THE ASHRAMA, OTTAPALAM, 16TH JUNE 1927

SYLLABUS FOR RELIGION

teacher in the local High School has brought Swamiji a letter from the Headmaster requesting him to prescrible a syllabus for teaching religion to the students of the school.

Swamiji: "We have no syllabus. Religion is realisation. It is life that is important. It cannot be taught by reading from some books and explaining the meaning. In our Students' Home, the Swamis who reside with the students teach them the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*. They live and teach; they teach more by their lives. A house-holder working for a salary and ready to go away whenever a high salary is offered to teach religion! And that too, in half an hour, and in the midst of many other subjects! In the Students' Home the Swamis and the students live together. So they have ample time".

"Religion must be taught from life. We are not teaching this 'ism' or that 'ism' or preaching social equality. Our Mission teaches the old *Dharma*. We are not missionaries to prescribe text books for the several classes. We believe in individual instruction. Don't you see the children coming here, morning and evening? They do *pranamas* to God and to the *Sadhus* and do *Japa, Bhajan* etc... That is religion. Can you make such arrangements in your school? That will be real religious instruction".







NIRANJAN ASHRAMA, JUNE 1930

(FROM THULASI SUGANDHAM)

(Impressions and conversations recorded by a disciple, Sri Ottur Subramanayan Nambudiripad. Hearing from his friend that Swamiji had reached Ottapalam, he went to the ashrama with the friend and a few other bhaktas. The visitors approached Swamiji and made sashtanga-pranama. Swamiji received them cordially. Addressing them, Swamiji asked "Have you any questions to ask?" Sri. Ottur began...)

Q: The puranas say that Ajamila and others got mukti by uttering the Lord's name even without knoweldge or love.

A: That is to be considered as arthavada, laudatory, intended to create interest.

Q: Have not God's names more power than ordinary words?

A: God's name has infinite power. But what of that? Who knows its value? Give a rupee to the baby ignorant of its value; it is a mere hard thing, a stone. But to the grown-up man, it is a thing of value with which to buy enjoyable things. Similarly, to the knowing man alone, God's name is of great value, power and utility.

JAPA WITH MEANING

Q: Is it possible for all to think of the Lord's real form?

A: Every one can think of a form only according to his mental capacity. A child of two years call its father "father, father". Its twenty - year old brother also calls him "father ,father". Does the child know anything about the greatness of the father as its brother does? Suppose your name is Subrahmanian*. [In fact, this was his name – Swamiji could never have known it from anybody as this was his very first visit. On hearing the name Subrahmanian, your father, brother, uncle, all have separate notions and feelings regarding the same individual, Subrahmanian. The one thinks of you as a son, the other as a brother, the third as a nephew. Yet, all of them have you in mind. Much the same way, all people think of the same God although their conceptions and feelings differ widely.

Q: The mind never gets concentrated during japa. How to get it?

A: Practice is the means. What wonderful bodily feats some perform? Sandow is an example. There are some who can remember a thing heard only once.

0: How can such retentive power be acquired?

A: Perfect brahamacharya. But then, health is the foundation for all practices.

The devotee took leave, falling prostrate before Swamiji who blessed him. It was after the lapse of nearly two years that the devotee saw the Swamiji again. The devotee prostrated himself before Swamiji. After some time, he told Swamiji that he had come to pray for his blessings. 1 pray for your health', said Swamiji. 'It is not health alone that I seek was all that the disciple could utter. Swamiji looked at him for a few He then ventured to add, 'I believe Swamiji knows what I seconds. want'. Yes, that is why I asked you to come the day after to-morrow'. That day the devotee's younger brother also accompanied him. After a few moments' silence, Swamiji graciously asked him also to come.

On Monday, both of them were initiated in the morning. Soon after, both of them wanted to take leave of Swamiji who enquired if they had taken any prasad. The disciple returned in the evening when he asked what sort of life he was to lead and Swamiji said: 'Lead a moral life till you get married.' The next day Swamiji asked him whether the disciple's father had known that he had gone to the ashrama and whether his father had any objections to his visiting the ashrama.

Devotee: He has not openly expressed disapproval. He thinks that I get polluted if I come here. So on my return, I have either to take a bath or to lie that I have bathed.

Swamiji: What custom is this? Achara is what is approved by the wise. Your present-day customs are anachara.

Devotee: Has, then, purity or impurity no meaning?

Swamiji: What is purity? It is purity of the heart which comes of devotion to God. The Padma Purana, a very high authority says: 'Pure or impure, or in whatever condition, whoever thinks of God is bodily and mentally pure'.

BHAKTI

Q: I wish to hear what bhakti is.

It is that attachment to God which the worldly-minded have towards sense-objects. It is not easily got. When one is thoroughly satisfied with sense-pleasures and has no more cravings for them, then one begins to get that *bhakti*.

D: I am unable to get that bhakti and vairagya however much I try for it.

A: You will get both. Go on with discrimination, japa and dhyana. In course of time you will get it.

7TH SEPTEMBER, 1934.

Q: How can one know a guru?

A: You cannot. If you can, then you are greater than the guru.

Q: How then can an aspirant get a guru?

A: God is the indweller. He knows both the guru and the disciple. He sends the guru to the deserving.

Q: What sort of a person is a guru?

A: Ordinary people think of a *siddha-guru* as one who never eats a good meal, nor uses a soft bed, nor sleeps. If further, the man is also a palmist and thought-reader or a fortune - teller, why, he is the *Yogi* of the *Yogis*! The real test of a *guru* is *Siddhi*, not jugglery.

FITNESS OF DISCIPLE

O: How far can a guru help a disciple.

A: He can instruct as to what ought or ought not be done. The work must be done by the *sishya* himself. If the *sishya* is not fit, if he has not the yearning for realisation, the *guru* cannot help him much. There is no use engaging a great scholar to instruct a dullard.

Q: Can the guru give a lift to the mind of the sishya?

A: No, I have not known such gurus.

Q: How else did Girish Chandra Ghosh get God-realisation?

A: I do not know that. That was an exceptional phenomenon. I am speaking of the ordinary run of mankind. The oil poured on the image at Guruvayur cures some diseases. But in how few cases only! It is utter folly to rely solely on the efforts of the *guru* for one's own spiritual advancement and at the same time to work heart and soul for one's worldly enjoyment.

WEDNESDAY, 2ND OCT. 1934

Q: The puranas say that persons who were killed by Rama, Krishna and other avataras attained moksha. Is it possible?

A: You think that avataras can kill others, don't you? I doubt it. God is all love.

Q: God's killing is not like the killing by ordinary people. It is His love for the wicked that prompts Him to kill them.

A: Kill out of love? That is fine indeed! You kill those whom you love, do you? (Swamiji laughs aloud) Is it an ordinary fortune to meet with death at the hands of Rama or Krishna.

Q: Was it only in samadhi that Bhagavan's outward consciousness was absent?

A: In any condition, waking, sleeping, dreaming or in the superconscious state, He could control all bodily actions, even breathing and heart beats. Doctors were stupefied. Their science could not explain any of those phenomena.

O: We wish to hear more about him from you direct.

A: Oh! That is not capable of being expressed in words. It is to be known by the mind. Only persons who are prefectly pure and highly advanced in sadhana can rightly understand His life.

Q: So my case is hopeless?

A: Why should you think so? Pray to Him to give you more of viveka and vairagya. Then He will graciously reveal to you His divine glories.

A THURSDAY, OCTOBER 1934

Q: Swamiji ! May not the time of siddhi be shortened by personal efforts?

A: What Totapuri attained after strenuous labour extending over forty years was attained by Sri Ramakrishna in three days. What I mean is that one should never sit idle but strive incessantly. 2017/00 1004 190000

O: Is not blind faith in the guru necessary?

A: Sri Ramakrishna warned us not to accept anythig without proper reasons. The word of the guru can be accepted only after you have found it worthy of acceptance, 'Blind faith' will naturally follow.

Q: Is not service to the guru essential for God-realisation?

A: Certainly, yes.

Q: What sort of service ?

A: All acts commencing from bodily service to whatever is pleasing and acceptable to him.

STRENGTH OF MIND

Q: Is the physically weak man fit to think of God?

A: Why not? Thought is a mental act, not a physical one.

Q: The Atman is not to be atained by the weak, says the Upanishad.

A: The word bala (strength) in the Upanishad refers to manobala (strength of mind). If physical strength were meant, Sandow and Ramamurti would have put God in their pockets. To the man of firm resolve comes mukti. It is the strength and boldness to overcome all obstacles in one's spiritual path that is wanted, and that is enough.

Q: How can we have vairagya?

A: To detach yourself from sense-objects, you have to attach yourself to God.

Q: Is renunciation of home absolutely necessary for God-realisation?

A: The more you approach God, the more you are automatically removed from home. What is apparently renunciation is really acquisition. The idea of 'l' and 'mine' gradually expands and envelops the whole universe. That is the experience of the real *sanyasin*.

NOVEMBER 1933

Q: During meditation, I don't see the form of the Ishtam; it is all darkness only.

A: Make japa continuosly. In course of time, you will get everything.

Q: It is very very difficult to control the mind.

A: Do not try to control it. Keeping on making *japa*, the mind will come under your control by and by.

RAMAKRISHNA, AN AVATARA?

A visitor: I wish to know if Sri Ramakrıshna was an avatara?

A: Who can say that ? Some take Him as an avatara. Others consider

Him an ordinary man. To some, Rama and Krishna are not avataras, but Gandhiji is!

Q: Is the Ishtam to be meditated inside or outside the body?

A: When the mind gets concentrated, you will not know whether the Ishtam is inside or outside. The object of meditation is to get rid of all such distinctions.

Q: I want to know, Swamiji, why God created the universe.

A: Because of His stupidity. (All laugh)

O: I ask in all seriousness.

A: I reply in all seriouness. But however serious we are, God is playful. He is like a child. The child makes a toy-house in all seriousness. The next moment, he dashes it to the ground. To us, calculating and serious grown-ups, it is all a folly.

O: What is the difference between bhakti and nishkama-karma?

A: They belong to two different categories. The paths are different. Bhakti has its root in love of God for its own sake. The root of nishkamakarma is unselfish love for humanity.

O: Should a bhakta do nishkama-karma?

A: He may, if he likes. If he does it, it will conduce to the purification of his mind. His supreme duty is to love Bhagavan.

O: What is tapas?

A: Real tapas is self-control. The best tapas is to take away the mind from the world and to place it at the lotus feet of the Lord.

Q: I pray that Swamiji may be pleased to remove my restlessness.

A: Swami has no power to control your mind. Swami may at best give you certain instructions. If you follow them you may get peace of mind. The teacher can but instruct. The learning must be done by the pupil himself.

O: I have heard that Swamiji is a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

A: I don't know that.

Q: Are you not a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna?

A: How can I know that? It is for Ramakrishna to determine whether I am His disciple or not.

Q. At least you have had the good fortune to see Ramakrishna.

A: To see! What of that?. The sweeper of His room and His Water-carrier saw Him daily. Our seeing Him! Of what avail is it? To see Him as He reveals Himself to us is a different matter. Such seeing alone is seeing, worth the name.

Q: Can God be seen ?

A: An anthropomorphic God can be seen by the senses. A transcendent God cannot be seen by the senses.

Q: Can a transcendent God be seen in any other way ?

A: How can I say that? I am within the range of the senses.

Q: Recently I had two extraordinary experiences. One may be said to be subjective and the other objective.

A: That distinction is wrong. Both are of the same kind. They are interdependent. All perceptions are the result of the union of the subject and the object.

Q: What I want to know is the reason for such experience?

A: Who can give the reason? Can we account for all our experiences in life?

Q: I shall be satisfied with knowing what it is?

A: Experience is experience. It is imagination only.

Q: Then this body is imagination, God also is imagination?

A: Why doubt it? Our conception of God is the product of our mental activity.

Q: I have described my two experiences. What were they ?

A: The same old question, again! You will be satisfied if you are told that your wonderful experiences have come directly from God. But I am a lover of truth and I cannot tell you so. I am not going to flatter you and mislead you by saying that you have had God-realisation.

The visitor was somewhat dejected and soon took leave of Swamiji.

RELIGIOUS MANIA

After he left ,Swamiji addressed those present and said,smiling:Look at that gentleman's delusions! What hallucinations! He wants an *Apta-purusha* to tell him that he has had visions of the reality beyond the senses, that he is a *siddha*, that he no longer stands in need of any

sadhana. Then he will be quite satisfied. Even from the start, I could sense his motive. That was why I gave him such answers. This is the beginning of the disease known as religious mania. As a matter of fact, even this mania is not altogether bad. It is some good past impression that generates such ideas. Although he has taken a wrong path just now, he will come round in due course.

It was about an hour after sunset, and a disciple rose from his seat to take leave of Swamiji.

Swamiji: Oh! If you stay here for the night, you will lose caste! Devotee: (Smiling) Yes.

S: That is cowardice.

D: How can I get rid of it?

S: Try, Try. You want to reach the East. Leave the West and walk on towards the East.

D: I am trying ,but not succeeding.

S: Success or failure depends on one's strength. Think of yourself as strong.

D: But I feel I am very weak.

S: You are ignorant of your own powers. The weakest man on earth has some little power. With that he can begin to practise and increase his powers gradually.

D: I despair seeing that even Yogis fall.

S: You are always argumentative. You don't try to rectify your defects. That is your weakness. You have been hammering this one idea of your own utter weakness into your brain all these years. Look at a new-born calf. What does it try to do? To get up and stand up on its own legs. The child falls and weeps. Then the mother strikes the place where the child fell. The child is delighted and gets up again. Growth is always gradual. You want to be a *siddha* all at once. You want your *Guru* to take you to *samadhi* by one sudden pull!

Well, let all these Vedantic talk stop for the present. This won't help you now. It is getting dark and it is about to rain. You have to cross the river. Your Vedanta will not save you now.

So, to be practical now, let Vedanta be dropped for the present. The disciple took his leave.







A FRIDAY, JUNE, 1935

RAMAKRISHNA, THE RELIGIOUS LABORATORY DEMONSTRATOR

t was 5 P.M. Swamiji, sitting in the portico surrounded by devotees, of his own accord, began:-

These are times of change in everything. But, there is a basic principle running through all these. That principle is changeless,God. It was to point out this immutable, basic principle that Sri Ramakrishna came. God is the goal of all Indian activities. Religion is the life of our land. If that is taken away, India perishes. India cannot understand or appreciate politics divorced from religion.Nor can India comprehend industrialism for its own sake without reference to our supreme goal, *mukti*. Once Gokhale said in Bangalore that politics should stand apart from religion.People did not accept his words.The same Gokhale said in after-years that politics must be spiritualised, if it is to touch the heart of the masses.Experience taught him the truth about our nature.Tilak,Gandhi and others also have understood this. That is why they have mingled religion or morality with politics and that is why they have a following.

Sri Ramakrishna came from an obscure village. He was like an uncut diamond. He did not argue about God, but showed God to us. The existence of God cannot be proved by logic. He was simply the embodiment of the spiritual energy of India. Just think of how gigantic His intellect was. Without education, without association with the educated, without any of the present-day culture, He could dive deep to the very bottom of all mundane and spiritual matters, keenly observe and correctly understand the multifarious tendencies of the modern minds, see far into the future and prescribe appropriate remedies for all its ailments.

Sankara, Ramanuja and the other *avataras* of old came to establish special systems of religion. They had to satisfy the intellect by reasoning and also to satisfy the spirit by realisation. They could not avoid being scholars themselves. But this time ,there was no necessity for scholarship. This is an age of demonstration. No amount of theories or arguments will satisfy the people. Every fact has to be demonstrated in the laboratory.

So. Sri Ramakrishna came not as a scholar but as a demonstrator, a great religious laboratory in Himself. He did not theorise. 'God is, I see Him, I can show Him to you' - that was what He said. Though Himself illiterate, the proud heads of profound scholars touched His feet in all humility and reverence. India had to bear many a severe blow from time to time; she had to suffer many calamities. But, She did not die. Her spirit was not touched, much less broken. If it had been broken, she could not have given birth to a Sri Ramakrishna. By producing Him, India has once more declared to all the world that she will not die; her life, her Dharma. will rise up and assert itself.

HARMONISED RELIGIONS

Sri Ramakrishna held that Dharma aloft. Along with that, He held up the Dharma of other lands as well. He actually practised them and found them true and then proclaimed that all religions are really true and if practised sincerely, will lead to God. He did not make a cosmopolitan religion like the Brahmo Samaj by picking up some essentials from all and combining them to form a new one. That is something like creating a new and wonderful form, with Japanese nose, European eyes, Indian face and Negro body. He did not attempt any such admixture. At the same time, He realised their underlying unity. The Christian will remain a Christian in form; his spirit will be permeated by Sri Ramakrishna. So with the Muhammedan. Gradually the whole world will be influenced by His spirit and take shelter at His feet.

GOD OF ALL

Recently, the Brahmos claimed Him as a Brahmo-samajist; the Shaktas, on the other hand, claimed that Sri Ramakrishna was a Shakta. Many Christians hold that He is an incarnation of Christ. All of them want Him as their own. None rejects Him. He is the guide of even the nihilists and atheists. The avataras of old gave Brahmajnana only to devotees of steadfast faith; deserving souls alone got their grace. But Sri Ramakrishna calls upon all—even rank atheists— to partake of Brahmajnanam. 'Oh! man! I shall show you the truth which will make you free.'That is Ramakrishna's message.

RAMAKRISHNA - SPIRIT WILL BE EVERYWHERE

The rays of this uncut and unpolished gem will issue forth and illumine all lands. It will then be reflected back to India. It is only then that the Indians will open their eyes to His glory and understand Him. The gem is our own, not of the foreign people.

His life and glory do not depend upon any scientific explanation. They shine in their own right. Hereafter the work of all institutions and the life of all nations will be moulded in Ramakrishna-fashion. Politics and Government and all such things will have the Ramakrishna-mould. The next generation will see it. The power of Ramakrishna is now in its infancy. That mighty Power will take years to fully manifest itself and to envelop the world. The effulgence of Sri Ramakrishna will permeate everything.

HE ATTRACTS ALL HEARTS

There will be no 'Ramakrishnaism' or Religion of Ramakrishna.His spirit will be accepted by all. I do not know if you understand what I say. I find no words to express what I have in mind. What was He? How very few have understood Him! But there are some who can foresee things. They can and do see even now how Sri Ramakrishna has attracted the heart of the world, how organisations, institutions, religions and lives of different nations have begun to flow towards that ocean—Sri Ramakrishna. He attracted all hearts.

JUNE 1935

A Visitor :- I want some religious advice.

A: That is very general and vague. Religion is the internal nature of every one. Even atheists and materialists have religion innate in them, for the *Atman* resides in all. The desire to realise it, is religion.

Q: How is Atma-Jnana to be attained?

A: That is what I said. It has not to be acquired. You have it already. Remove the obstruction to the passage of the light of knowledge. Remove the coverings, and the *Atman* or Religion shines of itself.

Q: How to remove the obstacles?

A: By sadhana. Firstly, have the desire for Self-realisation. Associate yourself with people having that desire.

Q: What sadhana is to be practised?

A: The tendencies and powers of each can be known only by a *Guru*. You must see your *Guru*. He will advise you.

O: Who is a Guru ?

A: Guru means a teacher proficient in the subject. To learn about the Atman, you should resort to a knower of the Atman. The first religious teacher is the mother. The second is father. Any other Guru comes only after them. But parents are generally ignorant and they cannot give any religious instruction to their children. They have therefore to seek an outside Guru who has realised God, and who can transmit the knowledge to another. The Guru must be a srotriya and Brahmajnani. As Sri Ramakrishna has said, you can light a flame from another flame.



A SUNDAY, JUNE 1935

HARIJAN UPLIFT

A devotee who is a vakil has come to see the Swamiji.

Swamiji: How does the *Harijan* movement go? What sort of *Harijan* uplift is meant?

Devotee: All-sided uplift - political, social, economic, educational and religious.

- S: Oh! Religious upfit also is intended! How is it? As social and educational status goes up, religion goes down. That is what we see now-a-days. That has been my experience. So the expectation that the Harijans will grow more religious as they rise higher seems to be unwarranted. Reforms should be slow. Before raising the depressed classes, they should be made to understand the value of the association with the upper classes. Suppose all Harijans are allowed temple enrty all at once, will there be any change for the better? Out of mere curiosity, they may go to the temples for a few days. Then they will see that they have been befooled by the reformers.
- D: So the first reform should be educational, to enable them to earn something.
- S: Quite so.To try to rise them as they do now, means to uproot them and destroy them altogether. Proper education alone will open their eyes

to their disabilities. Educational improvement is impossible without economic uplift. So the primary thing is relief of poverty. They must have sufficient food and clothing, next comes education and lastly social equality.

Real equality is in seeing and realising the same Atman in all, in loving and serving all as the manifestations of God. Realisation of that truth leads to loving and real service to the Harijans. This was the service advised by Swami Vivekananda. He wanted them to be given food and clothing and education, both secular and religious. That was to be done in the spirit of service to the Lord, as Hariseva. That is superior to the idea of the uplift of the Harijans. Far-sighted men like Vivekananda alone can see what is conducive to the whole world. Now-a-days, Harijan uplift means that the avarnas are privileged to sit alongside of the savarnas and eat for a day. The next day, they return to their former status; the depressed remain depressed. Reformers are to be prompted by genuine love for the fallen and the depressed.



26TH EDAVOM 1111. **DIFFERENCES ARE NATURAL**

Hindi pracharaka has come:

Q: What should be the national language of India?

A: That is a political question. You may ask me a religious question.

Q: Should religion be taught in our schools?

A: Certainly.

O: Whar sort of religion?

A: Not one sort. All should be taught their respective religions.

Q: If so, how can there be unity between the different religionists?

that they have been belooted by the

A: It is not possible.

Q: Then, will these disputes continue for ever?

A: Yes. It has been so always.

Q: There were no religious quarrels during the time of Akbar.

A: Good God! You have not studied history. Akbar tried to establish peace and harmony. He succeeded to some extent, temporarily uniting a few. Disputes began with creation. Wholesale unity is impossible.

Q: Should not untouchability be removed from Hinduism?

A: Hinduism has no connection with untouchability. If it were a part of Hinduism, Nanda, the *paraiya*, would not have had the path to *moksha* opened to him.

Q: This untouchability is seen only in Hindu society?

A: In another form it is largely seen in other societies too. You have heard that Lord Curzon could not take his wife – an American Commoner–to social functions of the high class people. If she attended, the other ladies walked out. That was an instance of untouchability. My friend, destruction of caste differences is not the way to establish unity. There are conservatives, liberals and labourers in England. Whatever their differences of views may be, they unite together when their country's cause is at stake. Similarly, Indians also can unite in spite of differences in religion and caste.

ROOT CAUSE OF DISUNITY

Swamiji: You have not seen the root cause of disunion. It is not caste. I have seen and spoken to many of the political leaders; Tilak, Gokhale, C.R.Das and Srinivasa Shastri are some of them. No two of them had the same opinion. They are all experimenting with one thing after another. Few had settled convictions. Which leader would you follow?

Devotee: I follow the principles of the Congress.

S: Very well and easily said! But my friend, the views of the Congress change from hour to hour. I should like to know what settled principles of the Congress you follow. You must love your motherland and work for it. But think well before blindly following these leaders. They falter at every step!

A new Sadhaka: I worshipped Bhagavati for four years. At the end of the period, she appeared before me and asked me to go to the Ramakrishna Ashrama. Why was I so asked? S: Could you not have asked Bhagavati Herself? How can I know Her mind? If you had true faith in the Devi, you would not have asked this question. The moment you hear Her words, you will go to an ashrama. There is no harm in your trying an ashrama.

A devotee comes, places a bundle of scented sticks before Swamiji and salutes him.

D: I am a vakil's clerk at Pattambi. For the last 12 years, I have been worshipping Sri Ramakrishna, placing a photo of His in my room. Today, I have the good fortune of meeting a disciple of His. I pray for your blessings.

S: It is very good that you are worshipping Sri Ramakrishna. Continue to do so without any break. May Bhagavan bless you. He is the *avatara* of this age. As Krishna was born in Brindavana, Sri Ramakrishna was born in Bengal. But that does not make Him the special property of the Bengalees. He belongs to all the world. He is the uncle moon. He who was Rama and Krishna has now appeared as Ramakrishna. This is what He himself told us. Worship him without break.

- D: I feel that Bhagavan Himself is speaking through Swamiji.
- S: You know I am speaking His words. I have no words but His.
- D: Bless me that I may have bhakti.
- S: You will have bhakti.

Earlier in the day, Swamiji's words were all fiery. To this devotee, he was all love and sweetness.

Another visitor:-The Shastras say that after death, man has to suffer in hell for whatever sins he has committed in life. Is it true?

- S: I do not know if there are special worlds as hells. But I know that all actions have a result. So far as I know, hell is mental distress.
 - D: Should one fix a time or a number of times for japa?
- S: No number, no time . In spirituality, what counting and what calculation is needed? A *bhakta* does *japa* and meditation simply out of pleasure.
- D: I did not mean that. I want to know if japa must be of the same number of times every day.
- S: Japa can be done always. Can you not repeat "Ram,Ram". The mind can silently repeat the *mantra* while eating, walking etc.

- D: What mantra should I utter for namaskara?
- S: Every one knows that... "Sthapakaya Cha etc." Go through Prabuddha-keralam where you will see so many mantras. Its subscription is only two rupees. You can well afford it.

JULY 1936

The disciple went to the ashrama. Seeing him, Swamiji said, "Oh! you have come in this bad weather".

- D: There was no rain when I started.
- S: Did you notice how the whole path up to the entrance gate has been covered with sand? Now it looks neat and no mud will stick to your feet.
 - D: The whole compound looks new.
 - S: Yes, there is yet a lot of work to be done.
 - D: Can I get more physical strength by practising Pranayama?
- S: Yes. Along with good food and sufficient physical exercise, if you practice a little *pranayama*, it may give you more strength. But living upon rice-gruel and doing no physical exercise, how can you grow strong by simply blowing your nose? *Pranayama* means filling the lungs with air by deep breathing. You pump air into a football. Does it become very strong? If *pranayama* is so good, why do I not try it myself? Why is it that I am consulting doctors, taking their medicines and the prescribed diet when I am indisposed? I now understand why Swamiji said, your country is a "lunatic asylum".

Do you know why even the so-called orthodox are so much after Yoga? Because they can save all trouble and expense. Yoga gives them all for nothing. You also have a little of that idea. But your Yoga is only for physical improvement. A religious man cares very little for his body. You hear all this. As soon as you leave the ashrama, you forget everything. You don't think over the words.

DIGNITY OF LABOUR

Swamiji next went to the Shiva temple where carpenters were working. Addressing the disciple, the Swamiji said "See these new designs. How strong the rafters are! Your carpenter will not approve of it. But (he added with a smile), this Swamiji knows something of carpentry too. In this country, the peoples' idea of a Swamiji is that he

must sit still and not extert himself. A sadhu doing physical labour is, in their eyes, not at all spiritual. While I was in Bangalore, I used to do garden work. A gentleman, now an I.C.S. Officer, seeing me grafting trees exclaimed: "Oh, why Swamiji himself does all this. Let the servants or disciples do it!"

"This poisonous idea was introduced by the Muhammedan Nawabs. Haven't you heard how, at the time of the mutiny, a Nawab was captured by the enemies? He could have easily escaped had he but used his legs. But there was no servent to help him to his shoes! The American conception is just the reverse. Even the President must know all sorts of work, tilling the ground, house keeping, cooking etc..

7 TH KARKADAKAM 1111 - JULY 1936

Referring to a gentleman's anxiety about his daughter's marriage, Swamiji said:

Now-a-days parents are very much concerned about their daughter's marriage. Why so much worry? Let them educate their daughters and leave the problem to them. They themselves will solve it. Men have the right of choice between a married or unmarried life. Why do you not give the same freedom to girls also? There is no impropriety in a girl leading a Brahamacharini's life. In former ages, there were many women who took the vow of life-long celibacy. There is nothing wrong in encouraging women to take such a course. The modern reformer compels the unwilling widow, to remarry! Swami Vivekananda has said that men cannot know women's problems. Women alone know their wants. The only duty of man is to give them proper education and leave their problems for them to solve.

A disciple :- A man sits down to meditate. At once bad thoughts enters his mind. In such a case, is he to prefer reading to meditation.

A: No. Meditation should not be given up. It must be practised under all conditions. As for the bad thoughts, he should try to drive them away as they come up. At other times he may read.

Q: The Bhagavata Purana says that the form of the Lord should be meditated part by the part at first, and finally the form as a whole. Is it absolutely necessary to follow that rule?

A: It is not a rule or injunction. Those who cannot imagine the whole figure are advised to begin by fixing the mind on one part. Novices have to practise it that way.

23RD KANNI, 1112 (AUGUST 1936)

A few young men from Ottapalam came to see Swamiji. One of them asked: Can a worldly man read religious books or practise religion?

A: Why not? Certainly, he can.

Q: But, will he not misuse his religious knowledge for improper acts?

A: That is a different question. But can you send worldly men out of the country? From the very beginning of creation they have been trying to root out wickedness from the face of the earth. Have they succeeded? The rogues and thieves will take refuge in religion. Even that is not without its benefits. In the long run, it will improve them.

MEAT - EATING

Q: Will abstinence from meat-eating help spiritual growth?

A: How can it? Were not Christ, a great spiritual man and Mohammed. a person of great enlightenment, meat-eaters? Coming to South India. was not the devotee Kannappar, a wild man with no culture, a great bhakta? He worshipped Shiva everyday with meat. (After narrating the story of Kannappar offering his eyes to Shiva, the Swamiji continued.) Now see how much meat-eating or vegetable-eating has to do with spirituality. I am giving you facts from history, I am not arguing the point.

Q: Mahatmaji says, vegetarianism is indispensable or at least, a great help to spiritual progress.

A: Why do you bring in the opinions of particular persons when there are historical facts to the contrary? Was not Tilak as great a man as Mahatmaji? You need not attach too much importance to Mahatmaji's views at the cost of other great men's opinions. It is only fanatics like Ghantakarna that do so. (Here Swamiji described Ghantakarna's fanactism in a picturesque way.)

A devotee: - Swamiji will perhaps stay here for one or two moths more.

A: Suppose I am going to stay here for life, will you drive me out? (Swamiji had a hearty laugh. He continued). So many are putting this question, even telegrams from North India. Bhagavan alone knows. It depends upon Gurumaharaj's will Man has no power.

3RD DECEMBER, 1936

The disciple, Ottur went to the Swamiji with a manuscript book in his hand.

S: What is that book?

D: Some slokas on Bhagavan.

A: Your own composition?

D: Yes.

A: What have you written about Bhagavan?

D: About some incidents in His life.

Swamiji took the book and going through it said: It is written in Malayalam characters, though the language is Sanskrit. Show it to Purushothamananda when he comes. 'So, where is Sri - ' (the photographer)? asked Swamiji.

KEEPING ONE'S WORDS

D: He said he would come.

A: You see, these people have no idea that they must keep their word. These poor girls have all come nicely dressed in the hope that their photo will be taken today. If he was unable to act up to his promise, he should have written to say so.

(After some pause).

The Maharaja of Travancore has thrown open the State Temples to all Hindus irrespective of caste. Now your Cochin Maharaja will outcast the Travancore Maharaja just as your abdicated Raja excommunicated and drove away from his State these poor Nambudiris. He may punish the Travancore Maharaja for his *un-shastric* act!

D: No. He hasn't got the power to do it.

A: In the native States, the Raja is all-powerful. Once I was the guest of the abdicated Raja. He told me, he had the power to drive away the Nambudiris. I can do just as I please, in my State' he said. There is a Swami, the son of the Raja's brother, who disclosed to me all the facts relating to this incident.

D: It was the community that did it with the help of the Raja.

A: No, not at all! What is your community? All are slaves of money. If they are paid handsomely they will all say, 'Oh! these are all innocent.

They need not be punished!'. For gold, they will do anything. Why blame you alone? Even the great Bheeshma admitted that all were the slaves of wealth, 'Arthasya dasah sarve'pi'. That was why he sided with Duryodhana! The heart-rending cries of these helpless men and women whom the Raja outcast have reached the ears of Bhagavan.

POLLUTION: DIGNITY OF MAN

Swamiji: You are all so selfish. Which shastra says that by touching or approaching a non-Brahmin, a Brahmin will be polluted? Who were the makers of these absurd customs but the selfish Nambudiris?

D: How could Sankaracharya be selfish?

A: Sankaracharaya was never selfish; he never said that a man should be treated worse than a beast. On the other hand, he glorified man by saying that it is after going through millions of births in other bodies that a jiva obtains, by great good fortune, a human body. And you? Will you allow a pulaya to come near you?

D: Has not Sankaracharya written in his bhashya that a sudra has no right to study the Vedas?

A: That is not the point. Did Sankaracharya ever say that a human being becomes untouchable by the mere accident of his birth? Take the Bhagavat Gita. Is there any mention of untouchability in it? Neither Krishna nor Sankara created this inhuman custom of untouchability. Who, then, did it? You Nambudiris!

D: The difficulty is that the orthodox pandits will torture the text of the Gita and make their own meaning.

A: That is another thing. Can any of them show that the Gita sanctions it?

D: No. But then, they will quote Manu or some other authority.

A: Let them. Let the pandits show a single line from any Shastra. A single line will do. Can they?

D: I shall ask them.

JANUARY 1937 BE HEROIC

As soon as the disciple approached the Swamiji, he asked: 'Did you ask that question?

D: There are no pandits there.

A: Then why did you not ask those orthodox Nambudiris? If they themselves do not know, why do they not call the pandits to discuss and decide the question? Selfish cowards! You, too plead for them. If you are a lover of truth, why can't you boldly tell them, 'you are all insincere! How dare you call yourselves Brahmins? You are neither the children of *Rishis* nor *Devas*. You have no religion, no God. Your religion is self-interest and your God *kama-kanchana*. I care a straw for your orthodox customs'. Can't you say like that?

No! you are also a coward, weak and timid. If there be but one or two God-loving heroes in your community, all those cowards will kneel down before them. But where are the heroes? Do you think a coward will ever become religious? A godly man never fears. What does Guruvayurappan want you to do? 'Kshudram hridaya-dourbalyam tyktvottishta paramtapa', 'Shake off this mean faint-heartedness and arise, oh, scorcher of foes'. Every chapter of the Gita emphasises this one point. What is the use of my wasting words on you? Will you, a coward, ever grasp their import?

JANUARY, 1937

THE GREAT CURSE

The next day the disciple went to the Ashrama in the evening. Swamiji was training the children in physical culture and helping them perform feats on parallel bars etc. While thus engaged he said: 'My hope is in these girls. They appreciate and care for instructions much better than boys'. When the excercises were over, the disciple approached Swamiji to take leave.

Swamiji: You are hurrying to go? There is good moonlight. Perhaps it is time for your supper! Only *Rakshasas* take supper at this hour.It is devoted by Devas or Brahmins to *Sandhyavandana*, *japa*, *dhyana* etc. But you are neither Devas nor Brahmins. You have been cursed by Sankaracharya. Don't you know that? My goodness! You stare at me as if you know nothing of this wonderful world! Well, then, hear this.

You, the hard-hearted, irreligious Nambudiris had the audacity to say that the great Sankaracharya was a *vidhava-putra* (the son of a widow) and you placed him outside the pale of your caste! When his venerable mother died, no Nambudiri went to help him to cremate her body. So he

had to do it all himself. He cut off the limbs of the body and carried them part by part and cremated them. Only a Marar helped him.

Don't you see how much the Nambudiris have fallen down from their original status?. They are still going down and down, and mark my words, they will go to the lowest depths of degradation. Now you drive away the untouchables. A day will come, and it is not far distant, when you, in your turn, will be driven off and shouted at, 'You Nambudiri, get away!' They will kick you out of the face of the earth. That reaction is sure to come. How will you escape the inevitable retribution?

THE WAY OUT - HEROISM

D: Is there no way out?

A: Yes, by becoming heroes. Have you forgotten all that I told you last evening? You did not understand any thing?

D: No, Swamiji, I understand that the way is to be kind and generous to the poor and down-trodden classes.

A: Very good! To be a hero means to be kind and generous! How can you show kindness to them? What did Krishna mean by asking Arjuna to be a hero? To be kind and generous! You cannot understand anything. A coward will never understand what it is to be a hero.

JANUARY, 1937

ASHRAMA FOR VANAPRASTHA

Today is Swamiji 's birthday.In the course of the conversation with devotees, Swamiji said: 'Poor Mr. N. - has some family trouble. He is worrying himself unnecessarily. Perhaps he is a little touched in the brain. Sanity is a great blessing of God. (To a devotee) Now, you and your wife can lead a life of retirement. Most of your sons are grown up. They will shoulder the family burden. You can live in peace. For P- also it is time to retire, to be a *vanaprastha*. These Ashramas are meant for that.But very few want it. Only through great good fortune, one feels inclined that way. Haven't you heard of one of our brothers, Gopal Dada? He was very old and entangled in family ties. But there was some *poorva-punyam* which led him to Bhagavan in his last days. That saved him. He became Swami Advaitananda.'

WOMEN'S EDUCATION

Swamiji: I want a woman teacher for our Girls School. She can reside here, teach and look after the girls. Any educated lady without family ties will be welcome.

T: It is very difficult to get that sort of mistress.

A: No, no, not so very difficult. Don't you know, the Harijan uplift movement has made people more interested in humanitarian services. Our school will not follow the Government curriculam. I don't want our girls to be educated that way. I have experience of University women teachers, well-dressed, worthless mistresses! We want our girls to be so trained as to be of use to themselves, their homes and their country. They must grow strong and healthy. Elementary education with some knowledge of English, Sanskrit, Home Science, Physical Culture: this is what we wish them to have.

Health is one of the greatest blessings of God. What can the weak do? Neither for this world, nor for the next are they fit. People like our friend here (Swamiji points to the disciple) who neglected health in their younger days and are now suffering in consequence will be ruined if they marry. Weak, unhealthy men and women will do well to abstain from marriage. (The disciple was surprised that he got the answer to the question he had in his mind).

BHAGAVAN'S DELICATE BODY

The Prince of - has arrived.

Swamiji: (To the Prince) How are you, keeping all right?

P: Yes , Swamiji.

A: (Pointing to some bundles and tins) What are these ?

P: Some fruits, biscuits and other things.

A: The fruits may be offered tomorrow. The other things and biscuits can be taken to my room. Tell them so; otherwise they will offer those things also to Bhagavan.

P: Did not Bhagavan take biscuits?

A: No, how could He? His stomach was so weak. His diet was very sparse. He could not digest new rice. One spoonful was enough for Him. Devotees would bring plantain and other fruits, sugar - candy etc. He could eat half a plantain fruit; and of grapes, but one or two. Biscuits

were out of the question. With that tender and delicate body, He practised hard tapasya for twelve years!

The birthday of Swami Vivekananda is being celebrated today. There are many visitors and devotees present.

Q: Have the visions which the devotees get any spiritual value?

A: They have. They indicate the progress of the *sadhakas*. But they are not the be-all and end-all of spirituality. One should not stop there.

Q: If they are only relatively real, is it not better to take up Jnanayoga instead of Bhaktiyoga?

A: No, never. Through the concrete alone lies the path to the abstract. It is true that a few exceptional persons take up *Jnanayoga* from the very start. They have done with the preliminaries in previous births.

Q: Do the Buddhists believe in incarnation?

A: No. The Buddhist philosophy does not admit of incarnation or reincarnation. The Hindu philosophy too does not admit them. The final conclusion of Vedanta is that the soul neither comes nor goes, neither dies, nor is born.

RE-INCARNATION

Q: But Swami Vivekananda has spoken of re-incarnation as evolution.

A: In all evolution or incarnation, there must be a continuing substratum, an unchanging common factor on which the changes appear. According to the Hindus, there is the soul which is the same in all these various changes. But the Buddhists do not believe in such an undying soul. Their conception is that the soul is *kshanika*, dying and being created every minute. Re-incarnation pre-supposes a fixed basic substance. The Buddhists deny the existence of such an immutable something on which changes appear.

Why bother ourselves with such abstruse philosophy? Now make arrangement for *Harikatha*. So saying, Swamiji left the seat and went in.

CASTE - PRIDE

After arati, the disciple approached Swamiji to take leave.

A: Are you going? Why can't you stay here? Other orthodox people

take *prasad* here. Here is the orthodox Prince. There is the orthodox Nambudiri from Pudukkad. Why can't you do so? You will be outcast! Will they outcast the Pudukkad gentleman?

D: No. His people may not know it at all. But my people are close by and are keeping a strict watch over me. May I ask a favour of Swamiji? My father has asked me to invite the Prince to our house.

A: How can your father invite him to your house? The Prince has lost his caste by taking Bhagavan's *prasad*! Yet he is a Prince! Then, why can't he come here himself, pay his respects to the Prince and then invite him? We took the trouble of bringing him over here and your father wants to take the benefit of it. No expense, no trouble. Simply send word, and when the Prince goes, entertain him with your *kalan* and *Olan* [curries] and go about boasting, 'the Prince was our guest!'. Tell him he is my guest. Let your father go to the Prince's palace if he wants to invite him.

D: My father will get angry with me if I say so.

A: Not at all. It is my word. You are simply to translate it. You are innocent, you have no hand in the matter.

When the disciple went to the Ashrama the next day, Swamiji asked him: 'Did you report my words to your father?'

D: No.

A: I knew you would not. Did you not hear that Mr.V.K.'s son, Madhavan, has fearlessly and frankly written to his father that I scolded him for bringing me a box of cigarettes purchased out of what little he got? Madhavan boldly confessed, and did his father get irritated?

RELIGION FROM HOMES

D: My father has not that regard for Swamiji which Mr. V.K. has.

A: You have no love for your father! You are afraid of him. How can fear and love, exist side by side? Look at these girls. How free they are with me! They feel pleasure in my presence. I train them to eradicate the very sense of fear from their minds. It is heroism that should be taught, not weakness.

Look at these girls, again, sitting before me and meditating. One is a Nambudiri girl, another a Nair, the third a Tiyya—children of all castes and classes sitting side by side. They have mutual friendly feelings. Seeds of culture are sown in their tender minds. They are the mothers of the future generation. You see, the home is the temple of religion.

To the Christians, the Church is everything. To see God, they have to go there on Sundays. But no Hindu has to go to a temple to see God. Every Hindu home is a temple; it has a shrine where God is daily worshipped. A pure house has the fit environment for spiritual advancement. But, now no Hindu home has any substantial religion in It is a nest of lifeless bones of all kinds of superstitions and cowardice; religion is but an outer covering of convention, forms and No warmth of feeling-just as your coming here, making rituals. sashtanga pranams and showing great Gurubhakti.

RAMAKRISHNA IS UNIVERSAL

Mr. Tampan and others have come to the ashrama, to request Swamiji to unveil the portrait of Sri Ramakrishna in the Ottapalam High School.

Swamiji: Ramakrishna is a universal figure. He connot be claimed exculsively by His devotees and disciples. Every man, every nation, has a right to celebrate His birthday and to worship Him. Rama was born in Ayodhya. Yet, the Malayalees celebrate Ramanavami in Malabar. Can the Ayodhya people claim it as their own? Rama is a universal figure, He belongs to the whole world. So is Ramakrishna. He was neither a Hindu, nor a Christian nor a Muhammedan. He was all of them. Has God any particular religion? God is God. It is man that makes such distinctions as a Paraiya's God, a Nambudiri's God and so on. Uncle moon, Bhagavan used to say, is the uncle of all.

Q: Have all the disciples of Ramakrishna got God-realisation?

A: How can I know that?

Q: Yet, so fas as your opinion is concerned?

A: My opinion is the impression that my mind has formed. It may not be true. People may say of a man that he is a great yogi. But the man alone knows if he is a real yogi or a downright hypocrite.

O: Pramahamsa at least had realised God.

A: Pramahamsa not only realised God, but gave realisation to others. He was a spiritual laboratory where God was demonstrated before our very eyes. He was the living God. He did not talk about religion, He lived it.

Later, unveiling the portrait in the High school, Swamiji said: "Ramakrishna, by Himself is like water, having no colour or form. He takes different forms by entering into vessels of different kinds. His message is being understood and appreciated not only in India or by theists alone, but by rank materialists and rationalists as well. He cannot be monopolised by the Indians or the Hindus, still less by the Ramakrishna Mission. The various celebrations and the enthusiasm evinced in them are not of the Ramakrishna Mission or movement. It is the people's. The whole universe has to be in transport of joy on the occasion of the Ramakrishna celebrations because the spiritual brilliance of Ramakrishna will penetrate into the darkest and most obscure corners of the world. It is no wonder that He has touched you too and you have been prompted to arrange this pleasant function."



5TH MARCH. 1938 NIRANJAN ASHRAMA, OTTAPALAM

Notes recorded and published in the Malayalam monthly, Vivekavani, by Mr.P.Govinda Menon, Editor.

("It was on Friday, the 5th of March 1938, on the 103rd birthday of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, that I had the good fortune to meet Swami Nirmalanandaji at the Ramakrishna-Niranjan Ashrama, Ottapalam. The substance of the conversation held that day is given below. It is impossible to convey to the reader any idea of the great power which was revealed in his words, flowing like a torrent, pure and clear. His sweet and hearty laughter, the lustre that shot out of his eyes and the majesty that enveloped him were an irresistible attraction to all.")

Q: What was the complexion of Sri Ramakrishna's person?

A: I can't say definitely. It varied with His mood. A man is gay and cheerful; his skin is then somewhat bright. The same man is moody and despondent, his complexion then is rather dark. Bhagavan's moods were immeasurably deep and strangely varied. These changes in complexion were therefore patent. I may generally say that His complexion was fair.

O: God's grace is said to be unconditioned, and the law of karma inexorable. How can the two be reconciled?

A: You want to measure God by human standards! How, then, is God superior to man? He connot be measured by human standards. That is why we say His mercy is unconditioned. But, cause must bring the sure effect, we cannot say, when? Actions, externally the same, may greatly differ internally. The results must therefore differ and so also the times of their fruition. But, sooner or later, the effect must follow the cause. With that firm faith, man must ever engage himself in good action.

Q: Is not man powerless? Are not all in God?

A: God has given man the power of discrimination. It is for him to use it properly. It is not the fault of God that a man running after vice gets a bad kick. Man is given freedom with a certain limit. A cow is tied to a peg with a rope. The length of the rope is its range of freedom. Man is endowed with the power to discriminate between good and evil. The use or abuse of that power lies with himself.

Q: Where do the mahapurushas go after death?

A: They go to the world of their choice and remain there doing good to the world. They can remain in *samadhi* also. Doing good to the world does not bind them. At the end of the *kalpa* they are liberated and they become one with Brahman.

Q: What is the true form of God on which to meditate? Rama, Krishna and other Gods are pictured in various forms.

A: There is an element of truth in every picture. As the mind becomes pure, the true form will present itself. The *maharshis* have actually seen those forms.

Q: What are the signs of a sadhaka's spiritual progress?

A: The more a man progresses, the more will he have mental peace, cheerfulness etc. That is the test. Persevere without despair. The result is sure to follow.

LAZY MALAYALEES

In the course of a talk the next morning, Swamiji said:- "India is steeped in Tamas, the people are indolent and inert. More so are the Malayalees. They are too big to do any work. For simple personal service, they want an army of servants. A Nambudiri cannot go out without a servant to carry his *chellam*. What false pride! What dependence! People who should be great heroes, to be so dependent and good-for-nothing!

There was a Nawab in Bengal, one of those vain glorious boobies living on the *malikhana* paid by the East India company. Having nothing else to do, he was playing chess with a friend. Just then, a maid came running to him crying that his house was on fire. He scolded the maid for her intrusion, called in his valets to attire him properly and finally walked on in a pompous gait. By the time he reached the place, there was no house but only a heap of ashes!

Tulsidas says, tomorrow's work must be done today and today's this very instant. Our people, however, have made it a rule to postpone everything to some other time, even unto the next life! I believe in American religion—activity and promptness. Time is not for being wasted. Whatever there is to be done ought to be done without a moment's delay. This false pride and indolence will never take us out of our slavery".

HEROIC ACTION

Our religion is what the *Gita* teaches, to fight with all our might when we are attacked, not to take the blow lying down. Look at our Gods and Goddesses! Every one of them has one or more weapons. Even the meditative God Shiva has a trident in his hand. Rama and Lakshmana go to the forest with bows and arrows and other weapons. That typifies heroism in action. 'Slain, you reach heaven; victorious, you get the empire', says Krishna to Arjuna. You take to your heels at the sight of the enemy and call it *Ahimsa*! It is cowardice with a religious cloak! If you want to rise, if you want to be free, you must become strong and active. Vanquish your enemies, be a terror to them! It is high time that you shook off the lethargy and entered the battle-field of self-conquest.

(It was on the 5th of March that, by these inspiring words, the Swamiji infused strength and courage into the hearts of his hearers. At the close of the talk, he said "I may give up the body shortly, at any time, who knows!" It was on the 26th of April that he entered Mahasamadhi!)

STRAY TALKS



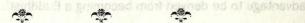
hen asked why some persons living in the company of great souls make no religious progress, the Swamiji said: "Because they have no receptive minds and no humility of spirit. They are like water-pots immersed in water upside down. One must have the desire to know and be of humble spirit".



hen asked about the meaning of *mantra*, he explained it and continued: "These *mantras* are the fruits of very hard *tapas* and supreme realisation of our great *Rishis*. The meaning of every one of them is very deep. Go on with *japam* as taught by your *Guru* with great regularity and devotion. More and more of the meaning will be revealed to you as you progress."



Brahmin boy expressed his desire to get initiation from Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj. You are a Brahmin' said Swamiji, You are already initiated. Can any *mantra* be holier and more potent than the Gayatri which you have received? Have faith in it and repeat it with devotion. In course of time, the Lord will reveal Himself to you and you will be blessed by Him'.



o a gentleman in service who thought of becoming a sanyasin after retirement, the Swamiji said: 'The best part of your life you have given to woman and gold. Still you wish to give some more of it to them. Then, in the end, what will you have to give to God? Any good resolution

must be put into effect at once. Yadahareva virajet tadahareva pravrajet - Renounce the world the very day you feel dispassion'.



o the Amildar of Shimoga, the Swamiji said: 'Every evil can be rooted out by practising its opposite. As a boy, I myself was a bit timid. But I desired to become bold and fearless. So I frequented burial grounds and got over that weakness. We can all become good and devoted to God if we desire it strongly and pursue the necessary course of practice with firm determination'.

'One should never be indifferent in any matter. Sri Gurumaharaj took Swamis Brahmananda and Yogananda to task for their indifference in certain matters. Once, when Gurumaharaj was about to sit down for His meal, He could not touch the seat. When questioned about it, Rakhal Maharaj said that it was arranged by a young disciple of Nityagopal. Gurumaharaj scolded him for his indifference and asked it to be purified and re-arranged. He could not suffer any touch or look which was impure!'



Shout educational institutions run by Christian Missionaries, the Swami said: 'It is not advisable to send Hindu girls to such institutions. Their ultimate-aim is to convert all to their own religion. Gradually, they will be christianised. I have had experience of this, both in America and in India. It is not therefore safe to put our girls under Christian Sisters, Mothers or Nuns'.



Shout the advisability of Hindus embracing Buddhism, Swamiji said: 'Hinduism contains everything of value in Buddhism; and at the same time supplies a personal God. So, for a Hindu, there is no advantage to be derived from becoming a Buddhist'.

On the life of Swami Vivekananda, the Swamiji said: 'In these days when patriotic workers for the welfare of India are required in enormous numbers, there is no greater soul than Swami Vivekananda. As an ideal for honest workers, he was the first sanyasin to break the barriers of

the inveterate exclusiveness of the Hindus, to cross the seas and to hold aloft to the outside world, the torch-light of the teachings of the *Vedanta* Philosophy; and it was he who raised the status of India in the eyes of the westerners. Any one who has even a superficial idea of his life and work, can realise, how ardent a patriot the Swamiji was, and how every throb of his heart was for uplifting the masses'



Referring to Max Muller's Life of Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji said: 'It is a mere comparative study. The Kathamrita contains only one aspect of Sri Gurumaharaj and a few fragments of His teachings. The revered writer was a school master. He could go to Sri Gurumaharaj only during holidays. Whatever he heard on those days, he recorded. He had no opportunity to see Bhagavan in all His various bhavas. The Leelaprasanga of Swami Saradananda is the most comprehensive work on the subject. The Swami, like the other tyagi disciples of the Master, stayed with Him day and night, for months together and had the unique privilege of witnessing and studying the manifold bhavas of the Monarch of bhavarajya'.



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REMINISCENCES



REMINISCENCES

Swami Tapovan Maharaj (Uttara-Kasi) Swami Purushottamanandaji Maharaj (Vasishtha-Guha) Swami Iswarananda Pandit P.Gopalan Nair Swami Sreekanthananda Brahma Gopal Dutt Sri, Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri Sri. Ottoor Subrahmanyan Nambudiripad Sri. Taamash Ranjan Roy Sri. Sankaraveli Parameswaran Pillai Swami Chidananda Sri. Madhuram Pillai (Swami Ambananda) Prof. S.K. Yajnanarayana lyer Sri. K.P. Achutha Menon Sri. K.J.Chengappa Miss. Indira Ghosh Sri, Kumud Bandhu Ser T. Kunjirama Menon

V.K. Narayanan Nair

SWAMI TAPOVAN MAHARAJ

Oarly next morning, I reached Bangalore city in Mysore State and spent two days there. In the course of my stay in the city, I was fortunate to get the most auspicious darshan of the renowned Sri SWAMI NIRMALANANDA, the President of the local Sri Ramakrishna Ashrama. He was kind enough to converse with me in English which was intellectually stimulating. Incidentally, he lovingly gave me a lot of advice and direction regarding the many holy places in North India which helped me a great deal in my stay at the several pilgrim centres in the North.

(Translated from his Iswara-darshanam Part II, Page3)



SWAMI PURUSHOTTAMANANDAJI MAHARAJ

t was at the palace situated near the Subrahmanya Temple at Haripad that I had the good fortune to have the *darshan* of SWAMI NIRMALANANDAJI for the first time. As the merciful glances of that divine personage fell on me, I was thrilled and charmed. I had the good fortune also to approach him and place my head on his Iap. Along with my head, I surrendered my body also to him. It is my conviction that my head is still resting safely on his Iap. I dedicate this, my autobiography (Iswara-Karunyam) also, at the lotus feet of that mahapurusha, my spiritual master, in deep devotion.

Vasishtha-Guha 19 - 9 1955. (Dedicating his autobiography to his spiritual master and mentor, Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, the sage of Vasishtha-Guha goes on to describe his intimate association with the Swamiji. It was at once his 'liberal education and severe apprenticeship'in spirituality. His impressions of the Swamiji in different moods and contexts are summed up and brought together as follows:)

lion among men, of noble mein and stature, with a pair of eyes shining like stars or flames of fire, the embodiment of manly strength and courage! At a bound, I fell at his lotus feet and placed my life and all its burdens there. That divine personage offered me refuge, peace and pure joy which is characteristic of the compassion shown by a spiritual master towards his disciple... It was evident even to a casual observer that the Swamiji was an expert in everything that he did. He was indeed a consummate artist and no wonder that with him as the President, the ashrama in Bangalore grew into a magnificent religious centre...

Giving instances of how Sri Ramakrishna trained His disciples like himself, the Swamiji used to say that 'a sanyasin should have the skill to do everthing perfectly'... And he was very particular in casting his devotees and disciples into that mould of perfection. In so doing, he often assumed the role of a strict disciplinarian and a hard task-master. His purpose was also to stamp out the inflated ego-sense in his disciples and so he chose to rebuke the offenders roundly in the presence of a large number of devotees. For example, once the Swamiji took me to task in public for using the language of flattery in thanking the President and the speakers of the meeting held on Swami Vivekananda's birthday. I was blind to the services rendered by the other devotees who were neither rich nor influential like those whom I thanked. The Swamiji began to shout at me, roaring like an angry lion,'... What! you are posing yourself as a bhakta. You are a false bhakta. Try to be a true bhakta. And then, why do you care for these ashramas made of stone and timber? Build the ashrama in your own heart and instal Sri Guru Maharaj there ... '.

The Swamiji himself used to say that his words of correction would sound as 'maaraka' (killingly cruel) but would prove to be 'taaraka' (liberating). So was his rebuke to me at that time, utterly unpalatable. But it is now that I enjoy its nectar-like sweetness. But those who had eyes to see and heart to feel could not fail to see and feel his

measureless love which he showed but rarely. For example, when one of the *Swamis* accompanying Sri Maharaj during his Kerala tour was criticising me with unforgiving harshness for my remissness in giving him sugar instead of salt, the Swamiji came to my rescue: What! Have you no eyes to see?', the Swamiji intervened in my defence, 'Serving day and night, he is reduced to a skeleton. He might have made a mistake. But surely, this is not the way to behave towards him.' Many incidents of the Swamiji's unbounded love for his devotees come to my mind. The days I spent with him were days of unbroken, unalloyed joy. It is my firm belief that those whom the Swamiji had accepted as his own have gained everything including the goal of human life.

(Free rendering into English from the Swami's autobiography, *Iswara-Karunyam*, Pages, 31, 36, 45 and 56).



SWAMI ISWARANANDA

ne incident during a conversation session with the Swamiji stands out in my memory. A group of devotees was seated in front of the Swamiji in the *Prabuddha Keralam* office in Trivandrum when I asked him, 'Is Sri Ramakrishna an incarnation of God'? "No, He is not", said the Swamiji. "It is Swami Vivekananda who is the incarnation. And Sri Ramakrishna! He is that great principle, that glorious effulgence which afforded the basis and occasion for that incarnation". He then fell silent and was seen shedding tears. As he remained in that state of emotional exuberance for some more time, I did not trouble him with any more questions.

Another incident which comes to my mind relates to a heated argument I had with the Swamiji on the day that the President Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji had visited Trivandrum for laying the foundation stone of the Ramakrishna ashrama, Nettayam. I was a college student then and the Swamiji told Sri. P. Seshadri Iyer after I had gone away: 'This boy would be ours'. Sri.Iyer told me of the Swamiji's prophecy about me several years afterwards. Happily enough, his prophecy has come true.

SAHITYA-KESARI PANDIT P.GOPALAN NAIR

had the unique good fortune to have the darshan of Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj at the Niranjan ashrama, Ottapalam for days together. Learned in English and Sanskrit, he liked holy company and enjoyed to hold conversation classes for the benefit of the inquisitive. He was a noble soul, the crest-jewel of spiritual wisdom. It so happened that once he revealed his knowledge of temple architecture by drawing the plan of a Shiva temple he proposed to build in the south-east corner of the ashrama compound. His love and sympathy for the poor were admirable and pronounced. On his return from Bombay and the North, he used to bring bundles of cloths from his merchant-devotees and freely distribute them among the Daridra-Narayanas.

Thirteen of the sixteen mental modifications were absent in him. It was natural for him to be friendly with his equals and to show compassion towards the lowly and the poor. An inauspicious thought, an excitable word or an unpleasant action was foreign to his noble nature. The significant name, NIRMALANANDA suits him most admirably. My firm conviction is that all those who have had some kind of association with him are really fortunate and blessed. And it is also my honest belief that joy arising out of companionship with such holy men is what all human beings should seek in life.







MY SPIRITUAL GUIDE AND GURU **SWAMI SREEKANTHANANDA**

(Swami Sreekanthananda was the first monastic disciple of the Swamiji from Malabar. He first met the Swamiji at Calicut in 1912 when he wanted to become a sanyasin. He became a Brahmachari at the Brahmananda ashrama, Trivandrum in 1924 after the passing away of his mother. He received sanyasa from the Swamiji in 1928 and went to the ashrama in Salem to become its first President. He left Salem for Trivandrum in 1944, spending the next fifteen years at the Nettayam ashrama. The last four years of his life saw him at the Sasthamangalam ashrama as the Swami-in-Charge of the shrine. He also visited the hospital attached to the ashrama, offering comfort and good cheer to the patients who seemed to care more for his words of consolation than the medicines and treatment from the doctors. He passed away peacefully on th 16th of August 1963 – The maha-samadhi day of Sri Gurumaharaj – amidst the singing of bhajans and chanting of His names from the ashrama bhajan hall and attained the lotus feet of the Guru in his seventy sixth year.)

aturday, the 11th of July 1912 is the red letter day in my life. It was on that auspicious day that I had the rare good fortune to have the darshan of Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj and take the dust of his holy feet.

While I was staying with a friend of mine at Calicut, I used to read Ramakrishna- Vivekananda literature and discuss it with the many friends who used to come together for the purpose once a week and on holidays for a couple of hours or so. In the afternoon of the 10th of July, a friend of mine came to me running and said, "As I was passing by the gate of Sri A-'s house, I heard someone with a resonant voice speaking in excellent English which made me stop and look in. I was surprised to find that it was a majestic-looking sanyasin who was addressing a gathering of some twenty gentlemen assembled in the portico. On enquiry, I learnt that the luminous, lion-like Swami was the President of the Sri Ramakrishna ashrama, Bangalore, Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj. Surely, it will do us a world of good to meet him". My friend was breathless with excitement as he finished speaking those words!

Fortunately for me, Sri A-was a very good friend of mine and so I sent him a note asking him to request the Swamiji to be kind enough to bless me and my friends by spending an hour with us. Luckily for us, the Swamiji agreed to accept our invitation and be with us the next morning. Eager with expectation but ignorant of properly receiving a divine personage like the Swamiji, I spent a sleepless night which I made use of, however, for writing down a list of questions to be given to the Swamiji. After an early bath the next morning, I kept ready a large plate of fruits and flowers, betel leaves, coconuts, sugar, candy etc., and awaited the Swamiji's arrival in a prayerful mood. At 8 0' clock in the morning, the Swamiji got down from a carriage in front of our lodge. We received him by placing the plate of fruits and flowers before him and ourselves falling prostrate at his holy feet.

The Swamiji blessed us with his all-enchanting, serene smile and with the all-merciful glances of his lustrous eyes which seemed to shower divine grace on us. He was taken upstairs to the hall where some forty devotees had assembled to listen to his words of wisdom. He was delighted to see so many educated young boys interested in religion. He spoke for a few minutes touching on some of the desirable and distinctive qualities of the Malyalees and on the simplicity, inquisitiveness and devotion of the people of Kerala, the land blessed by the birth of Sri Sankara. Then, the Swamiji invited questions from us, if we had any doubts. No one had the courage to stand up and ask questions, for such a situation was unexpected. Besides, seeing and hearing the great Swamiji, touching his holy feet and getting blessed by him were all that we asked for. However, I could make good use of the list of questions I had prepared the previous night. I presented to the Swamiji my list of thirty-two questions and it was not only my hand but also my heart which trembled as he took the list and began to go through it.

The Swamiji looked at me with a pleased smile as he finished reading the questions. But he struck off all but four of the questions and said that answers to those four would be answers to all the questions. Then, he began to answer them which lasted one hour. His answers touched on a variety of important points like the chosen deity, the necessity for a guru, the method of meditation, the usefulness of pilgrimage, how to concentrate the mind, avoidance of non-vegetarian food by a spiritual aspirant, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and so on. He dealt with those points at great length, no doubt; but it was the style, so clear, simple and full of apt and homely examples that, the Swamiji's talk left no one in any doubt about the topics he discussed or about his brilliance as a speaker. For us, it was a novel experience, that religion could be made so interesting and intelligible and that it was so intimately intertwined with every-day life. The Swamiji was pleased that so many young men had listened to his talk with rapt attention for about a hundred minutes. He said, "I am delighted that I could spend some time with young people like you discussing religion. May God bless you all...." We could take the dust of his holy feet once again before he bade us goodbye with folded palms.

The next day being a Sunday, many officers had gathered at Sri. A-'s house to see and hear the Swamiji. I was there, of course, with some of my friends who were staying nearby. Of the many topics of discussion, one was about the Swamiji's work in America. He said that he had only followed in the footsteps of his illustrious gurubhai, Swami Vivekananda who corrected a good many misrepresentations of India made in the minds of Americans by the narrow-minded and interested priests. It was Swami Vivekananda who opened the American and western eyes to the true picture of India's ancient civilisation and her eternal spiritual culture. He made many enlightened Americans and Europeans warm friends of India. It was his efforts as the Hindu monk of India that gave our country a prominent and respectable place in the comity of nations.

Our scriptual injunction is that the spiritual *guru* is to be looked upon as God Himself. And God is defined as 'of the nature of supreme love'. My own experience is that my *guru*, Sri Swamiji was the very embodiment of love and affection. The impression gathered by a casual observer that he gets angry quite easily is not altogether wrong. Whenever his disciples, particularly the inmates of the ashrama, are seen careless, casual, insincere or untrue, he rebukes them quite harshly and publicly, making his heart harder than a diamond. Once the defect in his disciple is removed, he becomes the old, gentle self again overwhelming the erstwhile offender with the pure love of a thousand mothers. Let me narrate an incident from my own experience.

Receiving the telegraphic information from Calcutta in December 1935 that the Swamiji was critically ill, I hurriedly started for Calcutta after sending a telegram to the Swamiji of my decision to meet him. The Swamis from many other ashramas in the South also had gone to meet him. He was very much upset and angry to see so many of us there and began to scold us in his usual, severe manner for deserting our posts of duty and reaching there without taking prior permission from him. When we explained that the telegram we got left us with little option, the Swamiji turned his ire on the Swami-in-charge who laid the blame at the door of the doctors attending on him. "How very foolish", he thundered, "that between you and your doctors, it was decided that I should die! What a pity that these boys were put to so much of trouble and expenses travelling all the way from the South!".

Turning to us, he said, "And who will look after the affairs of the ashramas in your absence? And now that you have seen me hale and hearty [In fact, he was not; he looked very much weak and tired] you must all leave for your centres tomorrow itself". But the Swamiji relented immediately and let us stay and serve him for a few days. He also arranged hot water for our morning bath, woolen banians and rugs for

use in the cold nights, Kerala dishes for our lunch, in short, everything for our comfortable stay when he himself was suffering from illness. Our Swamiji's loving concern for us surpassed that of the dearest mother for her children. Any number of such instances showing his love and affection for us, his dear children, can readily be given.

The Swamiji did not care to teach us Vedantic texts like the *Gita* or the *Upanishads*. His day-to-day life and the training he gave us were our lessons in practical Vedanta. To live with him was to get liberal education in religion. A few examples may be cited. Gardening, which was his 'serious hobby', was the duty which the Swamiji had given me to start with. He paid great attention in maintaining a garden not only for its beauty but also for its usefulness in offering flower-worship to God. I was very happy with my work in the garden as I got the opportunity to spend a lot of time with the Swamiji who himself took a great hand in gardening.

Once the Swamiji asked me to plant a dahlia seedkling and water it. A little later, he wanted it to be transplanted in another spot. satisfied with that either, he got me transplant it again. When he asked me to repeat the process for the fourth time, I was reminded of the story of the old Naraanath 'bhranthan' (mad man)! Mustering enough courage, I said, "Swamiji, because of this transplantation, this seedling, ! fear, is as good as lost", to which the Swamiji's reply was "Well, my boy, nothing is permanent in this world". He then watered the plant, washed his hands and walked back to the ashrama building reciting the famous verse from Sri Sankara's Hymn to Shiva, 'kim Vaanena dhanena....Sri Parvatee-vallabham' meaning, 'Of what avail, O Mind! is the whole world with all its wealth, comfort and luxury which are transient.....Throw them away and do your duty as directed by your guru in the spirit of worship to the divine consort of Goddess Parvati for the sake of Self-realisation'. Does this not contain the essence of all the yogas? And is it ever possible for me to forget this lesson till the very end of my life?

My promotion from the garden was to the kitchen where again the Swamiji used to give me the necessary instructions. It was from him that I learnt the art of cooking from lighting the fire to preparing the *naivedyam* (food-offering) to Bhagavan. It was from him again that we learnt with what faith and devotion we should offer food not only to God but to the God in man (*Daridra-Narayana*). From the kitchen I was promoted as the assistant to the Swami-in-charge of the worship in the shrine room. Soon

after, I had to do the worshipping myself when I approached the Swamiji openly admitting that I did not know any thing about the ritualistic form of worship. "That is nothing," said the Swamiji, " the important thing is to feel His presence and worship Him with devotion. Place the food-offering before Him and invite Him Iovingly, as you invite your parents, to partake of the *naivedyam*. Then, meditate for some twenty minutes or so, recite a hymn or chant His names and offer your prostrations before Him. All these are to help one remember God at all times, for the secret of one-pointed devotion is constant remembrance of God".

It was our practice in the ashrama to sing some bhajan songs after the evening meditation and before the arati. Similarly, we used to spend some time with the Swamiji after the night meal when he would speak on some topic that came to his mind. On one such get-together, he said "Sri Gurumaharaj has left the ashrama!" We stood paralysed hearing this sudden and unexpected announcement from him. "Do you know why?", he began to explain. "He found it impossible to remain here listening to your ear-splitting, cacophonous bhajan songs. Don't you know how well He liked bhajan songs and how melodiously He could sing them Himself? He used to fall into a trance-like stage of divine ecstasy whenever he heard soul - enthralling bhajan songs sung feelingly and with devotion, as was often done by Swami Vivekananda. But today. your singing was so harsh and grating that even I thought of making good my escape from here. What then to speak of the plight of Sri Gurumaharaj!" From the next day onwards, he began to teach us how to sing bhajans melodiously. We were not quite sure whether we had learnt any singing from him. What we learnt, however, was that the Swamiji's singing was quite sweet and melodious even in his old age and without any regular practice at singing.

It was poor me that the Swamiji had nominated as the President of the ashrama at Salem from its very inception. I let the Swamiji know of my honest fear of scholars approaching me for discussion on Vedanta when the fact was that I had no two complete ideas about *Brahma-Sutras*, the *Upanishads* etc., or about Sri Sankara's commentaries on them to rub together. The Swamiji consoled me saying, "What does it matter if you do not know how to explain those texts? Teach them what you know and where you are not sure of your ground, tell them so; they will only respect you the more for your truthfulness. But the important thing is to live the life as shown by Bhagavan and Swamiji. That is most

important. Spend more time in japa and meditation. Have unswerving faith in Him. He will look to all your needs. By the grace of Sri Gurumaharai, you will not be in want."

The Swamiji saw to it that the inmates of the ashrama practised japa and meditation both in the morning and in the evening every day without fail. He also encouraged us to make use of our free time for making a thorough study of the life and message of Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. Above all, he wanted us to have firm faith in Sri Gurumaharaj and to work whole-heartedly as the worthy instruments in His hands. I am sure that if we live up to his advice, we will attain our life's fulfilment. My contstant prayer is for my guru, Sri Swamiji's grace and blessings to fall on me in showers now and always, here and hereafter.

Om Shantih, Shantih, Shantih.



GOLDEN MEMORIES OF MY GURU BRAHMA GOPAL DUTT

(Sri. Brahma Gopal Dutt is the oldest living disciple of Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj. He has published a great deal in Bengali on the many-sided personality of his guru as well as on his long and intimate association with the Swamiji. His latest book entitled ,SWAMI NIRMALANANDA , A DIRECT DISCIPLE OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA was published in 1991. In this article, Sri. Dutt recaptures his first impression of the Swamiji reinforced by those on many later occasions during which he had seen and heard his God - like guru)

Le whose showers of mercy have sanctified my life, by whose divine grace I was dedicated at the lotus feet of the Great Master thus making my life ever-blessed, whose measureless compassion has filled my whole being with the thoughts, ideas and ideals of Sri Ramakrishna, he is my adorable guru and God, Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, one of the seventeen monastic disciples of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna.

Our family was associated with the Ramakrishna movement since the days of the Alambazaar Math. Our Bagh Bazaar house was virtually the guest house for the venerable *sanyasins* of the Belur Math during the first three decades of the present century. During this period, my father, Sri. Kiran Chand Dutt was an active participant in the activities of the Mission. He was fortunate to receive the blessings of the Holy Mother and all the monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna.

My golden memories about my guru take me back to the premises of the Belur Math on a day in February 1924 when the birthday of Sri. Thakur was being celebrated on a grand scale. As in the previous years, our tent was pitched on the eastern side of Swami Brahmanandaji's temple. It was from there that under my father's supervision, prasad was being distributed to the large number of devotees throughout the day. Looking out, my father suddenly rushed out of the tent, and asked me to follow him. Coming outside the tent I saw a Swami of great majesty walking past the samadhi-mandir of Raja Maharaj. Approaching him with folded hands, my father bowed at his feet and asked me to do so. Overwhelmed, I fell prostrate at his feet. With a pleasant smile, he lovingly placed his right hand on my head and said to my father in a soft baritone voice, "When I saw him last many years ago, he was but a child. Now, he has grown up into a young boy". Against the background of the quietly - flowing Ganges and the vernal sky lit up by the orange splendour of the setting sun, the tall and stately figure of the Swamiji with his eyes shining like a pair of stars and his rich, resonant voice produced such a supernal impression on the mind of a thirteen-year - old boy that it remained bright and beautiful even now when he is in his eighties. Whenever I close my eyes and throw my mind back, the incidents of that memorable day with the seraphic figure of Tulasi Maharaj at the centre come clear and crowding on the screen of my memory.

Since then, whenever the Swamiji visited Calcutta, I used to go to him to bow down at his feet and get his blessings. Often, he visited our house and on a few occasions even stayed with us for a day or two. Most of the time, he was seen conversing with my father and my uncle and I too used to listen to his wondrous words, sitting in front of him like one charmed. The Sixth of January 1930 was the red-letter day in my life; it was on that day that my life was sanctified by the divine grace of Tulasi Maharaj. On that day, he accepted me as his own by giving me mantra-deeksha.

Tulasi Maharaj accepted the Presidentship of the Vivekananda Mission established in 1929. Under its auspices, a religious conference

was held on the 22nd of Septmber 1930, the auspicious Mahalaya Day when the Swamiji was felicitated with Addressess of Welcome in the three languages of Bengali, Sanskrit and English. His reply to them was an unforgettable experience to the entire audience. He began with these words, "Here is a humble and most insignificant servant of Sri Ramakrishna before you. He is already a little more than three score and eight. Years of arduous and troublesome work have told upon his health and he is not a great speaker either. You cannot, therefore, expect a long speech from him......". But what an eloquent speech it was and in what a thundering voice! Like a bird in flight, his winged words soared and wheeled and flew straight into the hearts of the entire audience. They laid a mesmeric enchantment on the souls of youngsters like myself. We had heard of Swami Vivekananda as 'the orator by divine right' and wished that we were alive in those days to feel the 'thrills' and 'shocks' and 'transports' his words were famed to produce in the hearts of the hearers. But on that day, our wish was fulfilled in another form: Tulasi Maharaj, a brother-disciple of his, trained and perfected by him, seemed to reflect and echo the words of the great Swamiji Maharaj himself.

On several Durga Pooja celebrations, Tulasi Maharaj had come to Calcutta from Bangalore. It was a treat to watch the spiritual master standing before Mother Durga in self-absorption during the pooja and the aarati. His presence always added to the grace and solemnity of the religious festival. In 1931, when Tulasi Maharaj was with us during the Pooja festival, one and all of his disciples and devotees requested him to have him photographed. When a few elders like my father also joined the others, the Swamiji finally yielded. It was my good foutune that I was entrusted with the job of taking the Swamiji to the studio and back. Two photographs of his—one sitting on the floor in ardha-padmasan and the other seated on a chair — were taken. How proud and glad I was in travelling with him in the car and spending an hour in his holy company and at close quarters!

When the Swamiji came to Calcutta to attend the Pooja festival in 1931, my father earnestly requested him to tell us the circumstances of his receiving the mantra-deeksha from Sri Ramakrishna. Tulasi Maharaj, usually reticent about this sacred, personal matter of his, was kind enough to describe to my father on that day how Sri Ramakrishna took him to Panchavati and with a leaf of the Bel tree wrote the mantra on his tongue and uttered the same mantra for him to hear, thus formally initiating him into spirituality. I was fortunate to listen to this account from the Swamiji's own lips and I have given it in my book in English, Swami Nirmalananda – A direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. (Chapter V, Pages 116 - 117)

I had the unique good fortune to witness the touching scene of the mutual love and reverence shown by Tulasi Maharaj and Master Mahasaya ('M'), both disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. It was on the 6th of January 1930 when Swami Saradanandaji Maharaj's birthday was being celebrated by the Ramakrishna Sarada Math and the Vivekananda Mission of which Tulasi Maharaj was the President. When about 4 P.M., the venerable 'M' arrived, the Swamiji went forward hurriedly, took his hands and received him with great reverence. He asked 'M' to sit on his own chair which the master politely declined but instead sat on the carpet spread on the floor. The Swamiji said, "Surely, you have taken much trouble to come over here. I feel extremely glad", to which 'M' replied, "Why should I not come? It is Sarat's birthday and Thakur is worshipped here. Moreover you have invited me to attend it. How then can I refrain from coming over here?" Tulasi Maharaj wanted to touch the elderly 'M' 's feet; but 'M' prevented it by taking Tulasi Maharaj's hands in his own. It was an unforgettable scene of genuine love, love that existed only among the gurubhais of Sri Guru Maharaj!

Let me conclude these fragments of the golden memories of my guru with what Swami Baradananda told me about a prophecy Tulasi Maharaj made about me. In the course of his conversation with his disciples and devotees during his visit to Calcutta in 1930, he became indignant hearing some wild and false allegations made against him. "What!", he exclaimed in disbelief. "And —da at this game in his old age! If only I decide to speak out....." and then, he suddenly restrained himself and became his calm self once again. He then said with a pleasant smile, "Well, I have 'branded Bandil' (meaning 'initiated me') and he will set everything right". I had clearly forgotten these words narrated to me by Swami Baradananda long years ago. Only about a month ago, during a night in August 1992, the prophetic words of my guru flashed across my mind for no earthly reason at all. But it troubled me, particularly his prediction concerning me. It was a tearful, sleepless night for me and I began to wonder whether I had done anything to make his prophecy come true. I had the strange feeling that my guru was perhaps watching me from his supreme abode, the great beyond.

THE LIFE-FULFILLING 'DARSHAN'

VAISRAVANATH RAMAN NAMBUDIRI

(Popularly known as 'Vaisravanath', Sri. Vaisravanath Raman Nambudiri, like Pandit Gopalan Nair, was a profound Sanskrit scholar and a commentator of innumerable Vedantic texts. Author of several books, he won the gratitude of the religious-minded people of Kerala with his rendering into Malayalam of the celebrated SREEDHAREEYAM of SREEMAD-BHAGAVATAM. A true devotee of God who had His form in his mind and His sacred names on his lips, Sri. Vaisravanath here describes how he was blessed with the Swamiji's darshan which was his life's fulfilment.)

y God's grace, I had the great good fortune to hear about the life and teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna even from my boyhood days onwards. A drop of God's grace makes one all-powerful and all-knowing and fills the heart with ineffable joy and peace—so the scriptures say. One gets it from holy men and by spending one's time in their holy company and doing sincere service to them. I was not fortunate, of course, to have the *darshan* of Sri Ramakrishna, the incarnation of God in the modern era; but I was hoping against hope that I would be fortunate to have the *darshan* of one of His disciples.

I was a youth of eighteen when one day I chanced to get the happy news that Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, famed as the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, was to visit Trivandrum shortly for laying the foundation stone of the proposed ashrama at Nettayam near the city. Words cannot describe the waves of joy in which I was swimming at that time in eager expectation of meeting one of the foremost of those blessed souls who have had the rare privilege of sitting at the holy feet of the God-incarnate and serving Him for long. But as ill-luck would have it, I could not make use of that golden opportunity of meeting a companion of divinity. I was filled with keen disappointment and remorse for letting slip through my fingers the God-given opportunity of getting the life-fulfilling experience. However, I spent my days praying to the all-merciful God for the darshan of anyone of His divine companions still on the world-stage playing his part in the human drama. It took seven long years before the gracious Lord granted me my soul's prayer of vouchsafing the vision of one of His antarangas - Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, widely known among the Ramakrishnites as Tulasi Maharai.

I was thrilled to hear that the Swamiji had reached the ashrama at Nettayam where he would be staying for about a month. The news was nectar to my ears and I decided at once to go and meet him. On my way to the ashrama, I was assailed by many doubts and misgivings, like Kuchela on his way to Dwaraka to meet Lord Krishna. Do I really have His grace and blessings to come face to face with one who is liberated-in-life? How will he look like? Will he let this poor man approach him? What shall I ask him and in what language? These and many other questions began to run riot in my mind. Eventually, I reached the place where the ashrama was situated. And what a magnificent, fascinating place! On it bountiful Mother Nature seemed to have chosen to lavish all Her riches of beauty and grandeur! It put me in mind of the forest retreats of old and I could not step into the ashrama before first saluting the holy place enriched by palpable spiritual vibrations.

As I entered the portico of the ashrama, I saw a serene, majestic looking Swami with a pair of lustrous eyes sitting alone as if he was expecting devotees like me to go to him at that time. He received me graciously as I fell prostrate at his holy feet and he made kind enquiries about me. His noble form, his shining eyes, his resonant voice and indeed his very presence proclaimed that he was 'Sri Ramakrishna-Tulasi', Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj. As I could not speak English, I spoke to the Swamiji in Sanskrit, "I know neither dharma nor adharma; here I am Thy servant. Lead me along the right path; bless me with mantra-deeksha and accept me as Thine own". The Swamiji responded to my request in English (as his Sanskrit pronunciation and accent had the Bengali touch and therefore not readily intelligible to me), " I have not been keeping good health for some days now. We can think of it some other time. So, come to me again after a few days". I then requested the Swamiji to let me stay in the ashrama till he got better and regained enough health to bless me with initiation. He was kind enough to accede to my request and I stayed in the ashrama for nearly two weeks. Besides continuing my sadhana for what it was, I could see and hear the Swamiji everyday and take the dust of his holy feet daily twice throughout the period of my stay. I could have asked for nothing more.

In the course of the daily conversation session, the Swamiji spoke on *praanaayaama* thus: "Imagine the state of mind of a glutton in chains seeing plenty of rich and delicious food placed in front of him. Seeing the food before him and yet not being able to eat it! His desire to devour

it will surely increase minute by minute. *Praanaayaama* is forcing the mind to withdraw the senses from sense - objects without properly cultivating detachment. Far better is to immerse the mind in the practice of devotional exercises. By practising devotion, the senses and the mind will calm down by themselves. Self-control will then become natural and easy". From that day onwards, I began to immerse myself in devotional exercises attaching little or no importance to the practice of *praanaayaama* which was part of my spiritual discipline till then.

One day, the Swamiji told me all on a sudden," Get ready for mantradeeksha to-morrow". My happiness when I heard those words knew no bounds and I could not sleep that night for sheer joy! I finished my bath well before dawn, kept some plates of fruits and flowers, camphor, candy and other things and stood ready for the Swamiji's call from within the shrine. Soon he called me in , asked me to sit on the mattress spread for me on the floor and meditate on God for some time. As I was meditating, he ran his fingers along my vertebral column, from mooladhara to sahasrara. At his touch, O! what an indefinable, ineffable joy did I feel in every pore of my being! Presently, he gave me the mahamantra which is the be-all and end-all of my life. Then, the Swamiji, my guru and God, blessed me with these words of encouragment and promise, "Recite this with faith and devotion for as long a time as possible everyday. The allmerciful God will look after your entire spiritual welfare. His grace is the only refuge". I stayed in the ashrama for a couple of days more then, took leave of the Swamiji and returned home to complete my studies of Sri Sankara's commentary on the Brahma-Sootras.

Not much later, the Swamiji opened the Niranjan ashrama at Palappuram, a village some two miles south - east of the Ottapalam town. When he chose the village for the ashrama, many devotees from the town tried to dissuade him from starting it in the village as they expressed the fear that the rich and socially high townspeople might not care to go to the distant ashrama. The Swamiji replied, "Such people do not stand in need of an ashrama, for they are capable of looking after themselves. God exists for the poor, the weak and the lowly. An ashrama is meant for the good of the helpless. Therefore, let the ashrama be in the village itself for the benefit of the poor and friendless rural folks". No one could say a word against the just stand of the Swamiji whose words were instinct with sweet reasonableness. The ashrama turned out to be his favourite centre where he chose to stay for

two years running till his mahasamadhi in 1938. Its sanctity is matched. if at all, only by the Haripad ashrama which was the only ashrama in Kerala blessed with the stay of Sri Maharai.

It was my good fortune to see the Swamiji and listen to his words of wisdom on several occasions when he used to be in the ashrama. In the course of the talks, he used to dispel all my doubts unasked. He used to underline the promise made by Lord Krishna in the Gita that God would surely undertake the responsibility of ensuring the welfare of those devotees who dedicated themselves at His feet. Above all, his words had the magical effect of encouraging and consoling us in our life's journey Godward. We used to unburden before him our lack of spiritual progress in spite of our best efforts. On those occasions, he used to point to himself and tell us in a voice of calm assurance, 'believe here', and our doubts and fears would vanish instantly. How soothing, reassuring is it even to remember those words of the guru!

It seemed to us that he used to play with a variety of moods and emotions without in the least getting affected by them. Before the children, he was full of gaiety and laughter and merriment; before the earnest seekers, he was the personification of comfort and strength, their port of refuge. How cleverly and with what playful ease, he used to turn the tables on the argumentative people who wanted to show off their scholarship! With subtle, ironic humour, he used to expose the cranks and crooks and the money-changers in the temple of religion. And what an angry, awe-inspiring figure he appeared before his erring disciples and the inmates of the ashrama! He was truly a master of many moods, sometimes playful and at other times serious and serene. He was always active, busy with some work or the other. Rarely, he was seen also as a great devotee, shedding tears of love at the very mention of Sri Gurumaharaj. But whoever knew what he was to himself, aloof and apart from the world but identified with his own Self?

Somehow, we could feel that he was a whole heaven above what he appeared to us. A man of realisation, one liberated-in-life, he chose to come down to the world of the mortals as a companion of Sri Ramakrishna in His human drama. We are too insignificant to get more than a glimpse of our guru's spiritual grandeur. But even the blind can see that his astonishing achievement as a messenger of Sri Gurumaharai was the result and evidence of a part of the boundless spiritual energy that was lying dormant within him. All that we can safely say is that we are his

children and that whatever we are spiritually has been his gift. I for one feel certain that following his advice to the best of my ability and winning his grace and blessings, I have wanted nothing in moving towards the ultimate goal of life. Not my merit, but my *gurudev's* grace is the guarantee in my reaching the Supreme state of *Satchidananda*.

Hare Rama! Hare Krishna! Ramakrishna! Hare! Hare!

TULASEE - POOJA

OTTOOR SUBRAHMANYAN NAMBUDIRIPAD.

(Sri. Ottoor Subrahmanyan Nambudiripad, like Sri. 'Vaisravanath', was a great Sanskrit scholar, an author and a 'religious' poet who had composed exquisite lyrics both in Sanskrit and in Malayalam glorifying Sri Krishna, Sri Ramakrishna and his guru, Tulasi Maharaj, Swami Nirmalanandaji. His SRI RAMAKRISHNA SUPRABHAATAM and SRI RAMAKRISHNA KARNAAMRITAM are very popular among the devotees. Sri. 'Ottoor' was one of the Swamiji's favourite householder disciples and was intimately associated with him for over a decade. Keeping him as an excuse, the Swamiji had fired several salvos of ridicule and criticism against the foolish and cruel practices that went with 'Nambudiri Orthodoxy'. Here, Sri. Ottoor discusses the much-misunderstood temper, the angry outbursts, of the Swamiji in the light of his own experience.)

asyai Tulasyai namah": Obeisance to that 'Tulasi'.

The direct, perceptive experience of the devotees and disciples of Tulasi Maharaj, Swami Nirmalanandaji, is the authoritative proof of the fact that he was a messenger of God whose mission was to confront and defeat *Maaya* for the welfare of the good and the virtuous. His majestic figure and noble nature alike proclaimed that he was a superman, a herosoul. Smallness, cowardice or deviousness was alien to his nature characterised by manliness, purity and fearlessness. He resembled a royal sage more than a brahminic sage and reminded one of heroes like

Bhishma, Viswamitra, Arjuna and so on. One watching Tulasi Maharaj will wonder whether the Swamiji who is heroism embodied is not Parasurama come to Kerala to bless the people of the land in the modern times. Those who are familiar with any disciple of Sri Ramakrishna by reading his biography or even by seeing his photograph will have no difficulty in concluding that Tulasi Maharaj belongs to that blessed brotherhood. So strikingly majestic is his figure; his booming voice and his lustrous eyes similarly command and compel our admiration. Here, I shall try to recapture a few instances of Tulasi Maharaj's muchmisunderstood and much-maligned anger, his righteous anger and its significance, as it has struck me.

It passes our comprehension why at all there took place an ideological conflict between the Swamiji and the Belur Math which, no doubt, hurt the feelings of the devotees of Sri Ramakrishna. Such, perhaps, was the will of Sri Gurumaharaj! Had not the Lords, Shiva and Vishnu fought against each other? Similarly, Bhishma and Parasurama, Arjuna and Drona and so on. But once the battle was over, they became friends as of old. With reference to his relationship with Tulasi Maharai, Sri Mahapurushaji once said "It is true that there is the legal fight going on in the court. But if we happen to meet each other, we can still be seen locked in a warm embrace". As if to prove the truth of this statement by Sri Mahapurushaji, Tulasi Maharaj had actually held his gurubhai, Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj in a warm embrace and choked him with loving hospitality when the latter visited the Bangalore ashrama while the legal battle was going on. This feeling of affection and goodwill was not confined to his gurubhais but extended to his disciples as well. One or two instances will prove the point of his love of openness and sense of forgiveness.

A sanyasi disciple of the Swamiji fell at his feet and said, "I am obliged, Swamiji, to bear witness against Thee in the court. Pardon me, Swamiji, my offence". Far from cursing the disciple, the Swamiji, pleased with his straightforwardness, only blessed him with the words, "May Sri Gurumaharaj shower His blessings on you"! This reminds one of how Parasurama blessed Bhishma when the latter bowed before his guru and prayed for his blessings in the battle and again how Dharmaja recieved blessings at the hands of Bhishma and Drona when he approached them with humility and devotion before the commencement of the Mahabharatawar. Two other Sanyasi disciples of his slipped away

from the ashrama and joined the other camp, lured by promises of positions of power and influence. About them, the Swamiji wrote in a letter to another *Sanyasi* disciple, "I feel sorry for them; they will have to wander about for long in expiation of their old sins before they begin to feel repentance and come back to their senses. May Bhavagan bless them". One of them came back after a few years to the Swamiji, full of remorse and praying for forgiveness. Tulasi Maharaj gladly forgave him and made him stay in the ashrama for a few happy days. It was an instance of the kind and affectionate father joyously welcoming the prodigal son. He was indignant only when undignified acts were done behind his back and with a sly intent.

A casual visitor to the ashrama observing the Swamiji's anger used to get away with the surface impression that he was like Durvasas, the sage of irascible and knock-you-down temper. So what? Are the god-like sages slaves of the attributes of Prakriti like anger? Even their anger is a ruse, mere play-acting for teaching and blessing the worldly-minded. and not born out of ignorance as in the case of us, poor mortals. Studying his anger closely, one sees that he directs it only against his intimate devotees and disciples who have taken refuge at his holy feet. And that too, only when they show indifference or half-heartedness in serving God and His devotees. Whenever he detects laziness, hypocrisy, carelessness, egoism, selfishness etc., in his own chosen, he used to fly into a paroxysm of rage. His face will then become red with anger: he will then assume an aspect which is truly awesome and unapproachable. But never once had the Swamiji shown the least displeasure for the reason that he was not duly respected or that his comforts were not properly looked after. A few examples to highlight this aspect of the Swamiji's righteous anger can be given.

One night, the Swamiji was walking along a corridor in an ashrama when his leg struck hard against the sharp edge of a bench that the inmates of the ashrama had failed to remove from the pathway after their use. The Swamiji recoiled in pain and by the next morning his leg, where it struck against the bench, had become bluish and swollen. The inmates whose carelessness had brought it about shuddered to think of how Swamiji would react to it. But the Swamiji went about as if nothing had happened to him but simply directed the inmates to remove the bench from the corridor. But owing to their carelessness, the bench was not removed by nightfall. The painful experience was repeated that night

also, though the victim of it was a devotee who had come to the ashrama to meet the Swamiji and stay in his holy company for a few days. When the Swamiji came to know of it, he rebuked the offenders remorselessly and took the life out of them. This continued for a couple of days and more but the inmates who knew the depth of their *guru's* love for them only rejoiced at the justice of his punishment meted out to them so ruthlessly. Neither the Swamiji's love for his disciples nor their devotion to him suffered even by a whit in their intensity.

On another occasion, the chillam of the Swamiji's hookah fell on the ground owing to the carelessness of an inmate of the ashrama and it was nearly broken into two. Fearing that the Swamiji might take him to task for his carelessness, the inmate joined the broken parts together with gum, put a few pieces of burning charcoal in the chillam and placed the hookah ready for the Swamiji's use. Hardly had the Swamiji stirred the fire once, the chillam fell apart in two, scattering the pieces of the burning charcoal on the ground. The Swamiji had no difficulty in finding out the cunning trick, the crookedness and the deception practised by his disciple. Summoning the offender to his presence, the Swamiji hauled him over the coals and roasted him alive! On another occasion, the costly and delicate coffee pot which the Swamiji had been using for quite some time got broken as the Swami in charge of serving food to him was cleaning and washing the costly china. When the Swamiji was offered coffee from another pot, he asked the Swami as to what hapened to his favourite one. The Swami confessed to his guru that the pot got broken, struck against the stone-wall as he was washing it. The disciple feared instant and certain punishment for his carelessness. But the Swamiji just said, "That's all right" and forgot all about the pot! He would have inwardly congratulated his honest disciple upon the latter's firm adherence to truth even in the face of incurring the displeasure and wrath of his guru.

Once a disciple of the Swamiji belonging to the Cochin royal family visited the ashrama at Ottapalam to pay his respects to the Swamiji and stay with him for a few days. It was during this time that I too had a taste of the Swamiji's fiery temper, all-consuming like a conflagration. At the instance of my orthodox father who wanted to bask in the beams of royal favour, I asked for the Swamiji's permission to invite the prince to my house. It was then that the fire of anger burning within him leapt out, "If your orthodox people are that much loyal to royalty, does it not look

proper for them to come to the ashrama, get my permision and take the prince to their house? If they think that they will lose caste once they step into the ashrama, will it not be the same if the prince staying here as my guest happens to step into their house? Tell this as my reply to the request from your father and the elders in your house".

What provoked Tulasi Maharaj, the champion of dharma was the hollow claim of caste superiority by the Nambudiri brahmins and their supercilious attitude of looking down upon the ashrama and the classless, casteless way of life of its inmates. But when it came to currying favour with the Prince who was staying in the ashrama, their false sense of orthodoxy vanished into thin air! It was this caste prejudice and hypocrisy of the Nambudiris which evoked the Swamiji's righteous anger, ridicule and scorn. When he came to know that I did not deliver his message to my father and the elders, his anger raged like wild fire which struck terror into the hearts of the onlookers. appeared like another Narasimham, Mahasudarsanam or the all-destroying Lord Sri Rudra. With blood-shot eyes, bent eye-brows, curled lips and with upraised fists, how many times did the fierce-looking Swamiji not rush at me to rain down hard knocks on my head?. It looked as if my head would be smashed to smithereens. He was like Lord Krishna rushing at Bheeshma to kill him, and like Bheesma, I too stood before him with bowed-down head. But alas! neither of us had the luck to receive a knock on the head at the hands of the holy ones!

On another occasion, a senior sanyasin, in fact, the President of the Niranjan ashrama, chanced to speak, not a lie but a half-truth to the Swamiji who trembling with rage shouted at the Swami, also trembling – with fear. "What! speaking like this to my very face! Even when I was a brahmacharin at the Baranagore monastery, no one dared to utter falsehood to me. I would have kicked him out that very moment. And so inclined were most of my gurubhais". So saying, Tulasi Maharaj pushed the sanyasin to the nearby wall and gently knocked his head against it. Remembering this incident, the Swami told me years later, "The moment, he took my head in both his hands, my fear vanished mysteriously. Instead, I felt that I was in safe hands. Somehow, I had the feeling that beneath the show of anger, there lay his heart like a lake of love stretching before me. I have been serving him for about two decades now and during this long period, it was not showers of flowers but slings and arrows of rebukes that had fallen on my head. I would have

fled even from my parents in protest of such a treatment. And truth to tell, Tulasi Maharaj is not my *guru*. It was Raja Maharaj, Swami Brahmanandaji, who gave me *mantra-deeksha* as well as *sanyasa-deeksha*. Yet, see how I persist in serving him, suffering all his rebukes and punishments. Even to think of leaving him for a day is death to me. Can't you infer from it that anything from him is to me his choicest blessing. His wrathful exterior hides a vast and measureless ocean of nectar-sweet love".

If, in the course of the Swamiji sharply rebuking his intimate disciples and the inmates of the ashrama for some offence, his dearly-loved little ones were to reach the scene, he would immediately become calm and affable and begin to fondle the children. But the very next moment, he would turn to the offenders quite unexpectedly and continue to correct them from where he had left off. A garland in one hand and a gun in the other; nectar flowing from one eye and fire flaring out from the other; a sweet smile and a dark frown playing alternately on his lips - what a wondrous actor is he, playing with contrary moods and emotions at will with effortless ease! I have never before or since seen such a masterdancer, a Nataraja of such consummate artistic skill. Anyone who comes under the spell of a tenth part of the anger like the Swamiji's is sure to take a whole day to get back to his original state of mental calm. But the Swamiji comes back to normalcy within a second of showing towering rage. He is very liberal in showing his temper, unmindful of whether outsiders are present or not. He was quite sure that sincere spiritual aspirants and seekers of Truth will never move away from him frightened by his indignant rebukes. And never, never did he care to get a following or did anything to please or appease anyone. However, he was such a compassionate guru that whenever he heard of a devotee's illness, particularly when the latter happened to be the one ordered out of the ashrama, the Swamiii used to make kind enquiries of his health and send him prasad along with his blessings for the devotee's speedy recovery!

One morning, when I went to the Swamiji to take the dust of his feet, he said to me more in sorrow than in anger: "If you love flattery and cannot stand my rebukes, better go to some other swamis elsewhere. They may benefit by your service and your offerings in kind or cash. They will not displease you but only flatter you, for they are keen on getting what you give, not interested in your spiritual progress. But I desire your

welfare and expect nothing from you. That is why I do not spoil you with flattery and praise. In fact, do you give me anything? Instead, have I not given you everything?". Similarly, on another occasion when he was sitting alone, he said to me these words soaked in sorrow, "Why is it that your people are so heartless and ungrateful. Here is an old man from another place, unable to speak your language, an outsider having no kinship with you and working day and night expecting nothing in return except your welfare. Failing to understand why he uses harsh methods more than soft ones, they bear a grudge against him instead of feeling grateful to him. Does this old man need or has he demanded anything from these people?". I instinctively remembered the wise, old teacher who just escaped Prabhakaran's thoughtless act of vengefulness.

From the examples given so far, it will be amply clear to the readers that Tulasi Maharai was not a slave to the passions and emotions like anger, grief or joy, like us poor mortals. He could display them and yet escape from them unscathed, tame them and make use of them as their master, like Lord Shiva controlling and commanding His army of ghosts and ghouls. Seeing the wrathful form and nature of Tulasi Maharai, one concludes that he is like a forest on fire. How very few can find out that at the centre of the forest, there lies a large lake full of cooling water? It will be guite obvious to the discriminate that serenity is natural to Tulasi Maharai and agitation and anger an aberration.

Yet, it might be asked: Could he not have avoided the angry mood and trained his disciples using only the serene and the smiling attitude? This can be met by raising a few counter - questions. Why is there the cycle of seasons when the season of spring alone would have satisfied all? Why is it that the doctor does not use the same simple, pleasant method in curing patients of their diseases? And why subject some of them to surgery and its painful consequences? Why is it that the food that we eat is not made uniformly sweet? Could we not have avoided the hot and saltish items? Why is it that life itself is an admixture of pleasure and pain, success and failure, gain and loss? The answer is that life as a whole with its people, their natures and functions are vast, varied and dissimilar. Uniformity and sameness will hardly be relevant or applicable to these manifold cases. For a spiritual master enjoying unbroken samadhi, serenity and a sweet-smiling nature might look quite appropriate. But for one occupying the position of a guru whose duty it is to teach and train the world, using harsh methods becomes a necessity. And Tulasi Maharaj has used them only after due consideration of the offender's powers of endurance. No devotee or disciple of the Swamiji has looked upon his rebukes and chastisements except as a great blessing, a sign of his grace capable of cleansing the mind of the dirt and impurities accumulated in the course of several life-times. Blessed indeed are those devotees who were singled out for punishment at his hands!

Tulasi Maharaj once narrated to the late Sri.P.Seshadri lyer, a disciple of Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj, an instance of his confrontation with Swami Vivekananda which would help us infer the Swamiji's own attitude of love towards his devotees and disciples. The Swamiji said, "If these Swamis and brahmacharins here think that I am terribly angry, what will they say if they were to see the fiery temper of Swami Vivekananda? If these people look upon my treatment towards them as harsh, what would have they done had they to live under the Swamiji Maharaj whose method of training was harder by far than what the Swamis here receive from me. His cruel punishment, no doubt, flowed from love and showed a concern for perfection in whatever a sanyasin did. Many of us were unable to approach that awful task-master and even wanted to run away from him. Indeed, I did get away from him, unable to stand his sharp rebukes and severe punishments. Here are the ochre clothes you gave me,' I said to myself and dashed off to the calm refuge of my gurubhai Ramakrishnananda in Madras. When I reached the Math after two days of travel, Swami Ramakrishnananda showed me the telegram he received from the Swamiji, 'Tulasi has absconded. If he is there, drive him away'. Without uttering a word, I got up, ready to leave the Math when the telegraph peon handed over another telegram, again from the Swamiji, 1 am coming. If Tulasi is there, keep him till I come'. I was in a fix, at once anxious and afraid to meet him. However, I stayed on at the Math under pressure from Sashi Maharaj, trembling at the prospect of what the Swamiji might say and do.

Within four days, the Swamiji arrived and naturally I feared that terrible disasters would overtake me. But as soon as he saw me, he ran 'up to me and held me in a long embrace, bursting into tears. I too then began to weep like a child when he quietly began consoling me, Tulasi! I too feel that my punishments often cross the limits of endurance. But how can I help them since I have promised what Sri Guru Maharaj has

entrusted me to do? I have to be hard on you, chosen by Him as His instruments, for the fulfilment of His mission. Indeed, unnumbered are the torments I inflict on you; but do you think that I do so because I am heartless? Do you know with what high regard and deep affection I look upon my gurubhais like you?' When I heard those choked words of the Swamiji revealing and proclaiming his heart's love for me, all my defences broke down and tears of remorse rolled down my cheeks. I was ashamed of my crossness and misunderstanding which instantly left me. I returned to Calcutta with the Swamiji by the very next train. In fact, I was swimming in the current of his love". This picture of love that Tulasi Maharaj drew of Swami Vivekananda was truly the picture of love that overflowed in his own heart towards his devotees and disciples. But it requires his grace and blessings for us to understand it in its true sense and spirit. May we be fortunate 'to taste the ever-pure and sacred Tulasi water (Tulaseeteertham) flowing down from the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna - nithyasuddha Tulaseeteertham tadekam piba.



A MANY - SIDED PERSONALITY.

TAAMASH RANJAN ROY

(If Sri. Brahama Gopal Dutt had received the blessings of eleven monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna, Sri. Taamash Ranjan Roy had met seven of His sanyasin disciples and sat at their feet listening to their words of advice. Here Sri. Roy recaptures his impression of the many-sided personality of Tulasi Maharaj as well as a brief outline of the Swamiji's talks on Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother and Swami Vivekananda.)

t was some seventy years ago, during a summer afternoon in 1927, that I had the great good fortune of meeting the most revered Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj for the first time at the Sri Ramakrishna ashrama, Dhaka in East Bengal (now Bangla Desh). That was an extremely auspicious moment in my life. No doubt, my life was blessed and brightened by the love and grace I received from six other direct

monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna – the venerable Swamis Saradanandaji, Shivanandaji, Abhedanandaji, Akhandanandaji, Subodhanandaji and Vijnananandaji. But my association with Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj was something special and unique. It was my privilege to enjoy his holy company for a longer period, the one purple patch in my life which remained with me as the source of unfailing hope and strength for me to these my last days.

I was then a student of the Dhaka University, one who had developed a close and cordial relationship with the Secretary of the Dhaka Ramakrishna Mission, Swami Hariharananda who was a sevak of Raja Maharai for long. One day, he told me, "The revered Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj, one of the direct monastic disciples of Sri Thakur and now the President of the Bangalore ashrama, is coming here by the Dhaka Mail to-day. You must come here straightaway from the college. I need hardly tell you what a rare good fortune it is to have the darshan of one of Sri Thakur's santans". So, I went to the ashrama immediately after the college hours and as I entered the ashrama building, I saw that there was already a small crowd of devotees gathered in the verandah adjacent to the shrine and bowing before a majestic-looking sanvasin, ochre-clothed and grey-haired, with features of chiselled perfection. What impressed and fascinated me most were his eyes shining like a pair of stars. That was my first vision of Tulasi Maharaj and never before or after had I seen such a manly figure and such crystal-clear eyes which seemed to perceive the innermost thoughts of those on whom they fell. I prostrated at his feet when he made kind and affectionate enquiries about me. When he invited me to meet him again, I was overwhelmed with joy.

Two days later, on a Sunday, I went to the ashrama to have the darshan of Tulasi Maharaj once again. But this time, it was an entirely different aspect of his personality that I could see and not a little did that unexpected change in his mood surprise me. Tulasi Maharaj was sitting on a deck-chair, surrounded by several devotees. One among them had the indiscretion to ask a question touching, Swami Vivekananda's work in the West, which was certainly sarcastic if not disrespectful. That completely changed the otherwise calm atmosphere. As if thrust by a spear, the Swamiji sat bolt upright, his whole apprearance and attitude suddenly becoming fiery. Looking fiercely at the questioner with his piercing eyes, the Swamiji raised his voice a little and spoke to him in a firm, clear tone that rang like a gong or bell, "Look here, my boy.

Swamiji Maharaj is the *Acharya* of the age, the authentic and authoritative interpreter of Sri Gurumaharaj. Spiritual giants like him appear in this world once in several centuries. Follow his advice and the country will survive and prosper. If not, there will be no end to her miseries. It is a pity that educated boys like you make loose and thoughtless comments on a world-teacher and prophet like Swamiji Maharaj. This is extremely unfortunate, indeed shameful". No one had the courage to look at him in that mood or speak a word to him that day! Later on I heard many incidents in the life of Sri.Thakur, Swamiji Maharaj and the Holy Mother, narrated by Tulasi Maharaj himself.

At the time of Tulasi Maharaj's departure for Bangalore, I went to the railway station to see him off. He was sitting in a second class compartment unattended by any sevak; but he appeared to be quite happy without the fuss of any such service from anyone. He was extremely simple and natural in everything – his dress, his demeanour, his speech, in fact, in his life as a whole. A monastic disciple of Sri Thakur, a preacher of Vedanta in America, an elder Swami of the Order universally respected and even worshipped by the devotees in South India – all these outstanding attainments sat but lightly on his shoulders. He was indifferent to his own comforts; but no one cared more for the welfare of the poor and the needy. I have personally seen Tulasi Maharaj shedding tears of love and sympathy at the sight of the misery of the poor people. The sorrows and afflictions of mankind pained him. Not many succeeded in seeing his melting heart and the love which no mother had ever felt for her child.

In an intimate talk with some students of our university, Tulasi Maharaj said, "Sri Thakur is the incarnation of the age and His life and teachings are beyond the comprehension of the ordinary people. Even amongst us, His children, only Swamiji was able to understand the intrinsic meaning of His words of wisdom. If Swamiji were not amongst us, we would have spent our lives in tapasya in the Himalayas or wandered about in the many pilgrim centres in India. The wonderful ideas of practical Vedanta – work as worship and Daridra-Narayana pooja, for the salvation of the soul and the welfare of the world etc., – would not have found any application in life through the activities of any religious organisation. It was Swamiji Maharaj who made a religious revolution with the mahamantras uttered by Sri Guru Maharaj. Tulasi Maharaj was always eloquent, talking about Swamiji Maharaj. Once he

said spiritedly, "Leave alone Sri Thakur. You have not seen Swamiji; you can hardly guess what he looked like in his serene and serious moods. You have only seen a few photos of his and read a few of his speeches. Even with these, you are struck with wonder. Words cannot describe the grandeur of his regal bearing, his fascinating face with those deep, thoughtful eyes and the resonant voice! Oh, they are out of this world. And when he becomes angry, which is often, even Raja Maharaj dared not go near him!"

Tusali Maharai narrated to us an incident in the life of the Holy Mother which revealed Her nature, at once strict and compassionate. A profligate young man who approached the Mother obviously in deep distress was not permitted to go near Her. Remorselessly, She ordered him out; but the adamant young man, turned out of the house, sat outside on the road refusing to go away till the mother gave him mantradeeksha. He was weeping and refusing the food offered to him. At this, the Mother's heart began to melt. Summoning him to Her presence, She asked him to spend three days constantly uttering the sacred name of God inwardly. He did as he was told and on the fourth day, he went back home in great joy after receiving initiation from the Holy Mother. Recounting this incident, Tulasi Maharaj told us, "I had witnessed the whole scene with my own eyes. In the evening, when I went to the Mother to take the dust of Her feet, I asked Her, 'Mother, everything is subject to Your will. Why did You keep that young man waiting for three days?' The Holy Mother then said, 'No, my son, my will is not all at all times and in all cases. Waiting for the proper time is also quite necessary. That young man's mind was filled with impurities. Staying here for three days and uttering His sacred name throughout that period had somewhat cleansed the mind. If I had given initiation to him before first cleaning it, it would have done him no good. I had no other choice in his case. You have witnessed several such instances of strictness with Thakur also". Narrating this, Tulasi Maharaj suddenly became silent, perhaps enveloped in nostalgic thoughts about those never-to-come-back golden days.

Tulasi Maharaj was the embodiment of fearless, forthright thought and action. He was always cheerful, active and spirited. Another outstanding feature of his life was his infinite and implicit faith in Sri Gurumaharaj, in the Holy Mother, and in the prophet-saint of modern India, Swami Vivekananda. His words of advice to us, young men,

reflected this spirit: "Never lose hope", he used to exhort us, "for hope is the one vitally sustaining force in man. Again, have faith in Sri Guru Maharaj and Sree Ma. Their blessings are of infallible, unfailing power and benefit. Similarly, Swamiji's ideas are sure to fructify for the good of the world. Their blessings are always with us. Have faith in them and you have nothing to fear". My own belief is that it is through Tulasi Maharaj's grace and blessings that I have come to have faith in them and have become free from the many fears of life. From this side of eternity, I offer my reverential *pronoms* to the pure and peerless Tulasi Maharaj, Swami Nirmalanandaji.

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HIS MYSTERIOUS WAYS

SANKARAVELI PARAMESWARAN PILLAI

(Sri.Sankaraveli Parameswaran Pillai was one of the old-time disciples of the Swamiji. His whole family was blessed with initiation by the Swamiji. Sri.'Sankaraveli' was a staunch, life-long supporter of the Cause and had put in great efforts in starting many ashramas in Travancore such as the ones in Adoor and Kayamkulam. In this account, he narrates how the Swamiji had looked after the welfare of himself and his family in mysterious ways. By the grace of the guru, he became aware of a meaningful goal in life. It was his blessings that made life not merely endurable but worth living.)

uring the early days of my acquaintance with the Swamiji, I used to attend his meditation classes at Haripad held daily at 4 A.M. My mother-in-law used to dissuade me from taking religion so seriously while I was so young. She had not met the Swamiji during that period. When she had the occasion to meet him many years later, he asked her in person to give him something. She replied, "I have nothing now, except my heart, to offer to you'. Years later when she became the head of her family, she gave some land to the ashrama at Haripad and again some lands and a building to the ashrama at Kayamkulam. What was more, she gave herself to Bhagavan and became a sanyasini under the name, Nirmala-yogini! The Swamiji had greatly loved and blessed our whole family.

I was a clerk when I passed my B.L. examination. The Swamiji advised me to join the Bar whereupon I began practising in the district court at Kottayam. He next advised me to apply for the District Munsiff's post which I did but without any hope of getting it as it was the practice till then to recruit Munsiffs only from the Bar of the High Court in Trivandrum. But to the surprise of all, I was selected. Why such a new precedent was created to my advantage remained a deep mystery. My own belief was that it happened as the Swamiji willed. Similarly, I applied for a transfer to Kayamkulam, my wife's native place, when I was told that since I could have a local interest there, my request would surely be rejected. However, the Swamiji assured me that I would get the transfer to Kayamkulam. Strange to say, I did get it as the Swamiji willed – yet another new precedent, again in my favour! My transfer helped me in doing my bit for the ashrama in Kayamkulam.

In some official matter of very great importance, I had sought an audience with the Maharaja. But soon afterwards, when the Swamiji was proceeding to Kanyakumari for a three - day programme, I joined the other devotees and accompanied the Swamiji in his pilgrimage. On the second day of our stay in Kanyakumri, the Swamiji said, "Let us go back to-day, right now"! We feared that we might have unwittingly displeased the Swamiji for him to change his plan of pilgrimage so abruptly. However, obeying his orders, we returned with the Swamiji to Trivandrum. Reaching home, I was surprised to find the royal order fixing the audience with the Maharaja at 4.30 P.M. that very day! Had I not returned just then, I would have most certainly lost my job. What would not God or a god-like *guru* do for the sake of His devotee was all that I could think of at that time.

It was the Swamiji's practice of insisting on anyone staying in the ashrama as his guest to take his permission before going anywhere or leaving the place. One day, I went to the ashrama at Trivandrum to have his darshan and spend the whole day there listening to his class-talks. I took leave of the Swamiji the same night as I wanted to leave the ashrama the very next day long before day-break. As I was moving out of the ashrama at that early hour, I was surprised to see the Swamiji standing before me. Overjoyed, I fell at his feet and rose to take leave of him again when he said, "Hereafter, you need not take my permission to go to the town. You may come to the ashrama and return to the town, as you please". Alas! I did not know and could not guess that, very soon,

the Swamiji was leaving the ashrama and the world too – for ever! But I know and feel that he has not left me alone in this world. I always feel his presence with me, protecting me and my family in every way. It was he who woke me up to an awareness that there was a purpose, a meaning and a goal for human life. That made my life not only endurable but even enjoyable, a life altogether worth living. Tulasi Maharaj, my guru reminds me of the promise of Lord Krishna in the Gita = 'Yogakshemam Vahamyaham': 'I look after the welfare of My devotees'.

OUR SWAMIJI

SWAMI CHIDANANDA

(Swami Chidananda, the President of the Sri Sarada Ashrama, Sree Ramakrishna Nagar, Ottapalam is the seniormost among the 'children' of the Swamiji who had the great good fortune to serve him in his last days. She recaptures how the Swamiji had blessed his children even in his role as their grown-up playmate. Her reminiscences of the Swamiji echo the thoughts and feelings of all his 'children'.)

e have but vague and feeble memories of our Swamiji's many short visits to his favourite Niranjan ashrama which he founded in 1926. But we had the good fortune to be near him almost always for two years from 1936 to his *mahasamadhi* in 1938 and serve him during his last days, a blessed privilege which could not be claimed even by many of his grown-up disciples. We were too small then to disciriminate between good and evil and yet he blessed us with *mantra-deeksha*. "Do you want initiation?", he used to ask us and our enthusiastic and unhesitating response was, "Yes, yes, we too want it", thinking that initiation was some sweetmeats, beautiful pictures or playthings! He blessed us probably thinking that sowing the spiritual seed in us at an early age would result in our acquiring enough moral strength to withstand all worldly temptations as we grow up and help us realise our goal in life.

All - round development was what he wanted us to attain and it was towards this end that he had us taught and trained in the two schools he had founded for us. In the school classrooms as well as in the ashrama, we were seated in such a way that a Nambudiri boy or girl would be found near a Harijan boy or girl. This was so while learning our lessons, singing bhajan songs, doing physical exercises and eating food - free from considerations of caste, status or financial position. Our Swamiji used to feel very happy seeing that we enjoyed living as sisters and brothers belonging to the family of God. We are happy that we continue to practise in our life this one lesson taught by our Swamiji that devotees of God belong to one caste and class, His children belonging to His family. Along with the three 'R' s, he had arranged to teach us the lives of the great men of India, from incarnations of God like Rama and Krishna to Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. It was under his direct supervision and in his presence that we were given training in japa and dhyana. Furthermore, he took special care in providing the necessary facilities for physical exercises. The Swamiji himself, well past seventy at that time, used to personally train us in floor and bar exercises. And how happy he used to be, laughing and playing with us when we were going merry on those occasions!

Our Swamiji greatly loved us and he was never happier than when he was surrounded by us, playing about and making all sorts of noise in the process. But he could never tolerate our playing any game – 'tiger and goats', for example – listlessly or unintelligently. If we play the many games actively, cleverly and intelligently, he would laugh heartily and join us in sharing with us our joy and enthusiasm. But the moment we begin to lose interest and play a dull game, he would be really angry, would severely rebuke and punish us – even us, his dearest children! Once when he saw us playing 'musical chairs' indifferently, without the usual competitive spirit and the shouting and the cheering, he became so angry that he shut us up in a room saying, "Now, be here and play" which perhaps carried the meaning that we were good enough only for that much! It was our Swamiji himself who gave us the very useful training in cooking and needle work.

It was our Swamiji who taught us the value of promptness, orderliness and alertness in doing even simple, ordinary things. He could never pardon us for our clumsiness, indifference or absent-mindedness. If found guilty on such counts, he used to make fun of us or punish us till

we began to shed tears of shame and remorse for what we had done. On one occasion, when he wanted a pen-knife, we gave him a blunt one at which he began to rail at us with words of sarcasm and scorn, "Oh, you have all become disciples of Gandhiji! What wonderful adherence to the principle of non-violence!......". It lasted full fifteen minutes. perhaps more. On another occasion, we could not give him somthing he wanted because we had misplaced it somewhere. Very much upset and angry, he said, "Life is not to be wasted in searching for and recovering what is misplaced due to your carelessness. It is to be made use of for recovering through remembrance what was lost long ago through forgetfulness and ignorance". The meaning of these words of profound philosophical wisdom was lost on us, no doubt - it was perhaps meant for the grown-up swamis who were standing close by. All that we knew then was that he was very much displeased with us and all that we could do then was to take a silent, secret vow not to do anything that might displease our Swamiji. He alone knows whether we have kept that vow since then or continued to displease him as on that unhappy occasion!

Our Swamiji used to feel immensely happy seeing us engaged in games and exercises and making a god's lot of noise. He used even to join us in our laughter and merriment. But if he noticed that we did not stop them even by sun-down, his attitude would change, as well as the tone of his voice; he would then command, "Come and meditate". All noise and laughter and play would cease immediately. In two minutes' time, we would be in our places for meditation, such as it was, and the only sound that could be heard then was the sound of his hookah! Not a leaf stirred in the meditation hall or near about at that time! Our Swamiji wanted us to grow strong in body and mind so that we would be able to take up any responsible work that might be entrusted to us in later years. He certainly did instil in us a little of his strength and spirit during the two years we spent in his holy company, particularly during the days he was lying ill before his mahasamadhi when we were permitted to attend on him and serve him, in preference to his sanyasi disciples, who could do the work infinitely more efficiently.

It is very true that our Swamiji has made fun of us, rebuked us, punished us and on occasions even reduced us to tears. But he has also laughed and played with us and loved us dearly. He was our playmate and companion, our guardian and guru, a relation of such intimacy and warmth that no senior disciple of his, could claim his love and affection in such an ample measure. We were his dearest and nearest, his own, even as Prahlada was to Lord Vishnu, in His manifestation as Sri Narasimham. There were Brahmadeva, Lord Shiva, Goddess Lakshmi, Sage Narada and the gods led by Indra. It was not for their sake but for the sake of Prahlada that the Lord assumed that form. Not they, but the boy devotee alone showed the freedom and fearlessness to approach that terrible form of the Lord. The comparison perhaps is not very apt in all respects. However, it is idle to dismiss it as wholly irrelevant and absurd. It is an exaggeration, no doubt, but an exaggeration of a vital truth. We may have our own faults and defects which are inevitable in the vast drama of life. But surely, it is his grace and blessings, his compassion and love that we feel even now that made us inmates of the Sarada ashrama to lead a spiritual life. We feel sure that our Swamiji is still with us, guiding us through the many vicissitudes to the final goal of reaching our Swamiji, our *guru* and our God.

MADHURAM PILLAI (SWAMI AMBANANDA)

y whole family consisting of my brothers, sisters and a large number of relations was deeply attached to the Swamiji. All the members were either his disciples or devotees. He used to visit our house at Mavelikkara during his visits to Kerala. My brother, Damodaran was childless even after nine years of married life. Once when we accompanied the Swamiji to Kanyakumari, he prayed to the Mother to bless my brother with an issue. One day, I told my brother in the Swamiji's hearing that the first-born should be dedicated to Bhagavan to become a sanyasin. "No, no, that can't be," said the Swamiji. "The first-born will be a girl. She is a gift, a blessing of the Mother. So, name her "Kumari". The child born was a girl and she was named Kumari.

I had the strange experience of Sri Guru Maharaj's picture appearing as that of the Holy Mother and vice versa. I was at a loss and was wondering whether I should not ask the Swamiji about its significance, if any. Then, one day, in the course of a conversation, the Swamiji said,

"Sri Guru Maharaj has told us that one hundred per cent of Himself is Mother and that there is no difference whatever between Him and the Mother."

We had the good fortune to belong to the earliest group of the Swamiji's devotees from Kerala. He used to refer to us as 'the devotees from Mavelikara'. His grace took the from of an invitation from him to me and my brother to accompany him to Belur Math and the other centres of pilgrimage in the North. It was due to his grace that we were blessed by the Holy Mother. We had also the rare privilege of seeing with our own eyes the Shiva dance in which the *gurubhais* of Tulasi Maharaj danced around him installed as Shiva. One had to see to believe the deep and divine love that existed among them. We were eye-witnesses of the unique love shown to the Swamiji by his great *gurubhais* like Swamis Brahmanandaji, Premanandaji, Saradananadji, Turiyanandaji, Shivanandaji and others. I feel that my life is blessed because the Swamiji was kind enough to shower his grace on me. I firmly believe that those fortunate souls blessed by him have gained all and have nothing to fear here or hereafter.

♦ Page 1 Page 1

S.K.YAJNANARAYANA IYER

had the privilege of knowing the revered Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj fairly closely for many years. I was at Salem between 1917 and 1922 as the Principal of the Salem College and the Swamiji used to stay in the town every year for a few days as the guest of my good friend, Sri B.V. Namagiri. On all those occasions, I had the privilege of offering him bhiksha in my house once every year. Every member of my family had received his blessings which we have kept as our most sacred treasure. The Swamiji was particularly fond of my children with whom he joked and laughed like an elder playmate. They too moved freely with him and loved him more than they did any one else in the family.

The Swamiji was pleased to invite me to Bangalore to deliver a lecture on the occasion of Sri Gurumaharaj's birthday in 1920. Sri. Namagiri and myself spent three days at the Banglore ashrama with the Swamiji as our host. And what a wonderful, ideal host he was! He was an expert gardener and a master in the art of grafting. He not only loved his garden but took a genuine delight in taking his guests around and showing the many rare and beautiful varieties of flower in it.A great spiritual master as he was, he was also a good teacher in worldly matters. If he set his heart on doing anything, he would accomplish it within the minimum possible time and no detail, however trivial, would escape his attention. There was the touch of the superhuman in whatever he did. Yet,he was intensely human which showed itself most clearly in his exquisite sense of humour. He used to crack jokes endlessly and effortlessly, often at his own expense! For example, he once said that he alone was the real Vedantin, for he alone had the full measure of Vedanta as he had lost all his teeth. And showing his dentures, he would give his definition of Vedanta: Vi-dantasya bhavah-Vedanta!

As a direct disciple of Sri Gurumaharaj, the Swamiji was spiritually very great indeed. His was an impressive personality and he chose to reveal its manifold aspects only to those who won his grace. No devotee or disciple, however intimate he may be, can claim that he has understood the Swamiji's greatness in full. Many like me had the privilege of seeing and hearing him several times. But how many of us can say that we have truly known him? It was Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj's personality that prompted me to show respect to religious men. But, truth to tell, he was without a peer and I have not come across any Swami who can approach him in spiritual grandeur and majesty. Looking back on those days of my association with the Swamiji, I now begin to wonder whether my happy experience was an instance of unmerited luck or a golden dream.

K.P.ACHUTHA MENON

t was during my student days in Calicut that I had the good fortune to meet Tulasi Maharaj for the first time and take the dust of his holy feet. He was conversing with a few devotees when he greeted me with a divine smile and blessed me. I still remember his serene, smiling face and the eyes which shone like a pair of brilliant stars. His graceful, compassinate glances seemed to glide down into the inmost recesses of my heart. I have never seen such bright and brilliant eyes in my whole life, before or since. That was the most precious and memorable moment in my life when the hands that served the holy feet of Sri Ramakrishna, the supreme incarnation, were placed on my head to bless me. Little did I think at that time of the unique blessedness of the Swamiji's touch; but now, the very thought of it sends a thrill of joy through my body from head to foot.

It can doubtless be said that it was Swami Nirmalanandaji Maharaj whose blessings gave a direction and a purpose not only to my life but to that of every member of my family. I was fortunate to get initiation from Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, my mother from Swami Brahmanandaji Maharaj and my elder brother to become Swami Tapasyananda, Vice-President of the Ramakrishna Mission, only because of the boundless love and grace that flowed from Tulasi Maharaj, Swami Nirmalanandaji. It was the Swamiji's love and kindness which provided for me the rare opportunity of meetting Swami Brahmananadaji Maharaj, the spiritual son of Sree Ramakrishna, to touch his holy feet and be blessed by him. The scene of the Swamiji standing in an attitude of adoration before Sri Raja Maharaj, like the heroic Hanuman standing before his master, Lord Sri Ramachandra, is still fresh in my mind. It was a sight for the Gods to see. Seeing that divine sight, my eyes have seen all till they close in the final sleep from which no one ever wakes up.

An equally unforgettable experience of mine was the loving call I received at the hands of the Swamiji and I visited the Bangalore ashrama during the Christmas holidays. I was a student in my teens at that time and yet how kind and considerate he was in making my stay comfortable. Soon after I reached the ashrama and offered my *pranam* at his feet, he took me along to my room himself. "This is your room; do not forget to use the mosquito net at night. This is the switch of the corridor light and

But then,O God!when it flashed through my mind that an inmate of the ashrama could have given me those directions instead of the Swamiji himself doing it in person,my heart missed a beat or two. Where was I, a mere college student and where was the Swamiji, the President of the ashrama! One of the disciples and messengers of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna and the beloved *gurubhai* of god-like apostles like Swami Vivekananda, Swami Brahmananda and so on, adored by hundreds of devotees and disciples througout India!. What moved him to come down to my level except his boundless love for his children? I feel at once proud and ashamed of what the Swamiji had done for me that day. That single incident of his motiveless mercy is enough for me to cherish his sacred memory throughout my life and carry it even beyond my grave.







OUR PROTECTOR

K.J. CHENGAPPA.

(Sri. Chengappa of Mercara, Coorg and his family were the Swamiji's disciples. A life-long supporter of the Cause, he along with Sri. Kalamayya, was a pillar of strength for the ashrama at Ponnampet. Here, he narrates how the Swamiji had mysteriously protected him and his family in moments of crisis more than once).

n March 1930 or so, Parvati, my cousin had a dream-like vision in which she saw a bearded sadhu sitting in an easy chair by the side of the bed she was sleeping on. He told her, "Your days are numbered. On Friday, the 21st of April you should follow me at 12 noon". But as days passed, it was forgotten. On that particular day, Parvati took her bath. As it was a day of fasting, she had to make special offerings after

doing her devotional practices. When her mother went to the shrine, Parvati was not there. Alarmed, she hastened to the bed room, where she found her daughter lying on her bed, her eyes closed, body perspiring and cold.

It was then that she remembered the sanyasin's words. She ran into the shrine weeping and prayed for the safety of her only child. Gurudeva who was no other than Bhagavan heard her prayers. The daughter saw a light and within it the form of Sri Swamiji passing his hands over her from top to toe. Immediately she opened her eyes as if waking from sleep. On being asked by the mother, she related the experience.

Not long after, about the end of May, I had high fever which developed into pneumonia. I was taken to the hospital for treatment. That was on Sunday, the 6th day after I had fever and the doctors were all doubtful of my recovery. On Monday, therefore, Mr.G.Subbayya who had come to see me was asked to send a wire to Sri Swamiji who was then at Trivandrum, asking for his blessings. His reply telegram was despatched on Tuesday evening. "Don't fear. Ramakrishna's blessings on you" were his words. Fever left me that Tuesday evening and I was able to hear the wire read out. After a month we went to Bangalore to pay our respects to Sri Swamiji. On seeing us, Sri Swamiji said: "You did well in sending the wire".

The last time we had the privilege of seeing him, living near him and receiving his blessings was in 1938. We went there early in February and returned on the 15th of April. He was very glad that we went there for a long stay. On the 12th of April, I asked for permission to go back. He straightaway said: "Yes, you may go back any day, even to-morrow. There is nothing grand in the *Vishu* festival on the 14th. And there is no objection to your leaving the Ashrama to-morrow". He added that whenever I fell ill, I should go there(Ottapalam) and think, "My guru is great". We left the next morning. A week passed. In the second week after we took his blessings and left the Ashrama, we got by wire the shocking tidings of his *Mahasamadhi*. It we only then that we could make out the significance of his last words!

HIS INVISIBLE PRESENCE INDIRA GHOSH

(Miss. Indira Ghosh here records how the Swamiji has continued to bless and protect her whole family, his disciples all, long after his mahasamadhi.)

hen my father and mother were initiated by Swamiji, we, their children, were very young. I was 5 years, my elder brother 7 and my younger sister 2 years of age. When he stayed with us in our house at Chapra, we always kept company with him. He played with us, taught us many different kinds of play and new methods of playing. He combed our hair with his own hands, told us many stories and never rebuked us. When he initiated us three, we were mere children. But he knew our present and future and we had great faith in him. Though he has left the world, he has not left us in the dark. I feel his invisible presence protecting us at every step and blessing us every moment.

My mother felt his uncommon power twice in her life. One day – it must have been the day of Maharaj's departure from this world – she dreamt that she with other disciples was passing a night without sleep, decorating him in a hall. Worship, prayer, song and religious talks were going on. My mother asked them why they were keeping awake. They answered, it was Haribasar day and so they were keeping vigil with him. Mother mentioned it to us, but we could not make out what it meant. Afterwards we received the heart-rending news. It was after a long time that we came to know that he entered *Mahasmadhi* on Haribasar day and that Haribasar is Ekadasi day.

Some days afterwards, my mother was dosing, but not in sound sleep. She felt the touch of a soft hand. She felt afraid and asked my younger sister to keep her company on her bed. At that moment, an invisible voice whispered, "Don't fear. It is me! You are in great danger now. You should worship Sankat-Mochan at Benares". At that time, my brother and sister were seriously ill. She followed his adivce and all got well. Sankat-Mochan, she found, was Mahavirji.

My sister saw Him thrice before Her death. In the month of Jaishta in the year 1941, she was very ill and weak and was lying on her bed. She saw Maharaj come and touch her and pass his soft hands all over her body. From that day till the month of Jaishta in the following year she

was in good health. After that, she began to lose her health day by day and she became bed-ridden. In September, she saw him with a mournful face standing beside her with tearful eyes. After two days, she dreamt that she had gone to Maharaj. Her body was very light and she went to him walking. She found two halls, one full of women and the other of men. Maharaj was speaking with some one. She waited for him in the verandah. He came to her. She touched his feet and said 'O Maharaj, I was very young when you initiated me. If anything was left over, kindly give it to me now.' "I will give you everything", he said. Some three or four days after that, she was singing songs in praise of God. She asked us to change her dress, to clothe her in pure white and to keep the room pure and holy. We all sat around her. She said Maharaj and Ramakrishna had come. She kept silent. Her soul passed away quietly.

And March A Market Process

REAL MAHAPURUSHA

(Sri. Kumud Bandhu Sen, a well-known writer in Bengali, was an ardent devotee and faithful follower of Swami Vivekananda. He was fortunate to be closely associated with most of the monastic disciples of Sri Gurumaharaj from the 1890s onwards. Here, Sri. Sen gives his impression of how Tulasi Maharaj has continued to fascinate him down the decades from the Alambazaar to the Bangalore days.)

n the year 1894 or 1895, I met Swami Nirmalanandaji at Alambazaar Math as one of the sanyasins who used to live there. I saw him reading books, talking with us about religion, Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and sometimes helping others in the performance of the Math duties. He loved us all and we used to pay him the respect due to one of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. When Swami Vivekananda

came back to India, Swami Nirmalananda used to stay with him. The Swamiji loved him much and behaved towards him as to the other brothers. I saw him again in 1909 February in the Math and also at the Holy Mother's place.

We used to go to the Belur Math, to the Vivekananda Society and also to the other places where he was specially invited, to hear him. Many people asked him many questions on the Hindu Philosophy and also on current religious matters and he replied to them all in a most lucid style, sometimes with illustrations from the sayings of Sri Ramakrishna and giving examples of the wonderful life of the Master and his illustrious pupil, Swami Vivekananda. People felt something original in his conversations and those who had heard Swami Vivekananda's converstions felt and admitted that, next to Swami Vivekananda, he was ranked the best conversationalist.

Then, he went to Madras and Bangalore and whenever he came to Belur again, bhaktas used to go to him for his darshan, conversations and his illuminating discourses on Hindu Philosophy. Even at the meetings of the Ramakrishna Mission, his figure was most cospicuous on account of his brilliant discourses on Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and his comparative study of the eastern and western cultural aspects. In 1916, he came to take Swami Brahmanandaji to the Bangalore Ashrama. I also accompanied them in that journey. Some times we used to talk together about Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

At that time when we were alone, he used to sing a Vaishnava song of Radhakrishna composed by Girish Babu, a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. He used to sing that song with the utmost devotion and at time tears trickled from his eyes. Though he was a man of great control, he could not suppress his feelings of love and devotion. When we reached Bangalore, Swami Brahmanandaji asked me to write a full description of the Ashrama to Swami Premanandaji, mentioning the nice work done there by Swami Nirmalanandaji. Swami Brahmanandaji used to praise him during his absence.

Swami Nirmalanandaji used to look after Swami Brahmanandaji as the true representative of Sri Ramakrishna. He used to tell us that Maharaj was the *Manasa-putra* of Sri Ramakrishna, a true inheritant of Thakur's spirituality and a spiritual giant. He himself, during the morning and evening, bowed before his feet and took the dust of his feet and

often stood before him with folded hands. He often warned us that we must not make any difference between Maharaj and Thakur while paying our homage to Maharaj. He told us that Thakur was living in his body. We saw Swami Nirmalanandaji paying kind and affectionate attention to the untouchables who came to the Math. Even the menials of the Math were very fond of him and he used to help them in various ways.

He did many things secretly for the benefit of the poeple and for the institution. He did not like name and fame. He was an out - and - out sadhu. He used to live so unostentatiously that one would not imagine that a man of his position could live in that simple way. There was no hankering after name, fame or money. He liked gardening. At the same time, he looked after the comforts of the Bhaktas and Sadhus of the Ashrama, and preached high truth to the truth-seekers. Truly, he was a man of simple living and high thinking—a real mahapurusha.



MY PICTURE OF THE SWAMIJI

T.KUNJIRAMA MENON

(Sri. Kunjirama Menon describes how casual was his first meeting with the Swamiji. The impression he formed of the Swamiji was that he was the perfect embodiment of the gospel of strength preached by Swami Vivekananda. Sri. Menon was instrumental in introducing the Swamiji to the whole of Malabar. Here is the story of Sri. Menons's casual meeting which had far-reaching effects on the spiritual awakening of Malabar.)

t was in April 1912 that I met Srimat Swami Nirmalanandaji for the first time. It took place, one pleasant morning, at the Mettupalayam Railway Station. It was quite casual. I was then keenly desirous of coming across a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. An extraordinarily powerful voice, the like of which I had not heard before, addressing the luggage clerk of the Station, attracted my attention; and, when I turned round and looked up, I thought I saw a Malayali Sanyasin, between 45 and 50 years in age, yet retaining the exuberant energy of his manhood, soldierly

in gait and scholarly in his English. Wondering who this personage might be, I accosted the younger of the two Malayali gentlemen who were accompanying him; and this younger fellow-passenger, who was no other than 'Bhakta' Neelakantha (now Swami Purushotamanandaji) informed and corrected me, saying that he was the Swami Nirmalananda, a Bengali and a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji was going to Ooty to preside over the anniversary function of a Vivekananda Society that was working there at that time. I was going to Fernhill, a mile this side of Ooty, for a few days to recoup my health.

Reaching Fernhill, I lost no time in starting off to the little cottage on the edge of a beautiful valley which had been arranged for Swamiji's temporary stay. I saw him alone at the gate with a woollen wrapper round his body and a tobacco pipe in his mouth. We greeted each other and I introduced myself to him.

When I saw Swamiji quite close, I realised that the most remarkable feature of his physical person, next to his voice, was his brilliant and penetrating eyes. It seemed as though they were looking into the very soul of the person before them and not at the outward human form. I also saw that the Swamiji was very muscular and strong in body. Thus his voice, eyes and body, all of which bespoke strength, gave me the impression of a mighty mind inside. The teachings of Swami Vivekananda that strength was religion, strength was virture, strength was life, etc., had a great appeal to me. I was myself a strong, young man with an athletic and healthy body at that time. I thought that Swamiji was the perfect embodiment of that gospel of strength preached by his illustrious brother. Was not the gospel of Ramakrishna also a gospel of strength? Our Swamiji in his person was a constant reminder of this gospel.

In the course of his talks with me he said that he had not stopped anywhere in British Malabar and that he had no friends or acquaintance there. At once I invited him to the place where I was then practising – Badagara in North Malabar. Swamiji readily accepted the invitation and said he would be glad to come to my place in September-October that year, either on his way to or back from Travancore. After a brief pause he added that he felt as if Sri Guru Maharaj told him that something of His work could be done through me, in my part of Malabar. While demurring to that statement that something could be done through me, I assured him that whatever services I was capable of rendering to His cause would be ungrudgingly placed at his disposal.

When I was about to depart, Swamiji told me that the meeting at which he was to preside was coming off the next day and that if I could go to his cottage on time, all of us could go together in the carriage that would be arranged for him. I agreed and I arrived on time the next day. The carriage was ready, but there were six of us to be carried where there was room only for four. I offered to walk, but Swamiji would not allow it. He dragged me in and made me sit on his lap in spite of my protest. Thus huddled togther, we travelled a distance of about three miles. Swamiji was quite merry and laughing all the while.

The meeting was largely attended. Swamiji made an eloquent and inspiring speech on the 'Life of Swami Vivekananda as an Ideal for Young India. 'He stayed two more days at Ooty and we left the hills by the same train on the third day. I had thought of making a longer stay but having met Swamiji I could not forego the pleasure of travelling with him down the hills. Before leaving Fernhill, my host and relation who was the Station Master there, had given me a good quantity of boiled milk sweetened with sugar and some fruits to be offered to Swamiji on the way. It was an English cow's milk. At Mettupalayam which was very hot. Swamiji felt thirsty and wanted a cup of coffee. But there was hardly time. Thinking that, that was the moment when the English cow's milk would be relished best by Swamiji, I took the vessel containg the milk and said,"Why coffee, Swamiji, here is plenty of excellent milk boiled and sweetened. My host told me it is a nice English cow's milk specially got for thee."

So saying, I was about to offer a cup when he gave me such a stare of displeasure and disapproval as I would not forget all my life. The repetition and emphasis on the word 'English cow's milk'had evidently displeased him.I felt that like his world-renowned brother, Swami Vivekananda, he was an out-and-out Indian patriot first, and next only a humanitarian. Without speaking a word, Swamiji softened down, and said:"You see,I do not drink milk by itself. When I feel awfully thirsty,a good cup of coffee relieves me."At Podanur, I got him the good coffee that he wanted. Then taking leave of him we (the two Travancore friends, Bhakta and Mr. M.R. Narayana Pillai and myself) made our salutations to him. He blessed us all and asked me to write to him now and then.

I went back to Badagara and told my friends that a real Swami,a disciple of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, would come to Badagara in a few months. They seemed enthusiastic over the coming events. Most of the English-educated gentry of the place had come to know something of the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through some efforts made by me to scatter the Ramakrishna - Vivekananda literature among them. With their co-operation, it was easily decided that Swamiji's visit must be made a concern of the public of Badagara. In fact, it became the concern of the whole of Malabar.

By the year 1917, Swamiji had come to know where to concentrate and where not, in his work in Malabar. Tellicherry, one of the three important towns, he liked and continued to visit almost every year, but the conditions there were such that he did not expect any tangible and permanent results. Calicut, he saw, was dominated by the commercial spirit where religion either would not grow or would grow but slowly. Yet, it being the centre and the head-quarters of the District, he wished to do something there. Not finding, however, the right man for the time being, he postponed the work and waited for propitious days. They came later on. Palghat, another important town, appeared to him 'as dry as dust'. Ottapalam, he liked from the very beginning. After two or three visits, he remarked that he scented an Ashrama there just as a hound would scent a game. He visited these and many other places in Malabar. Wherever he went, he left an indelible impression which in course of time wrought a permanent change in the lives of many.







THE SPIRITUAL DETECTIVE

V.K.NARAYANAN NAIR

(Sri. Nair who was the President of the Vedanta Society, Ottapalam was the fortunate host of the Swamiji during the latter's stay in the town for short periods every year for twelve years from 1914 to the opening of the ashrama at Ottapalam in 1926. Sri. Nair gives his impression of the Swamiji— a fearless sanyasin who had little patience with hypocrisy in religion.)

Blessed indeed is the day on which I bowed my head at his

sacred feet. It was in the year 1914 that, in response to an invitation from me, the Swamiji blessed Ottapalam with his holy presence. We had started a Vedanta Society here, and under the auspices of that Society, we had celebrated the Birthday Anniversary of Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna the previous year. Swami Sharvananda from Madras was kind enough to preside on the occasion. His address was very much appreciated by the public. I was, however, longing to meet a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. Th opportunity was not long in presenting itself. I was informed by my friend, Mr. Kunhiraman Menon, that Swamiji would be passing Ottapalam on his way to Travancore in conection with some work there. Our little place with its quiet atmosphere and attractive natural scenery might serve as a good halting place for the Swamiji. So, I made bold request to the Swamiji to break his journey there and to take rest for a day or two. I introduced myself as a humble devotee of Sri Ramakrishna and wrote to say that myself and the people of the place would feel happy if the Swamiji would alight at Ottapalam and stay there for a couple of days. As my good fortune would have it, the Swamiji accepted my invitation and consented to be my guest.

A teacher, a father, a protector, a friend—what indeed was not the Swamiji to us! This is the feeling the Swamiji has inspired in the hearts of myself and all the people of Kerala who have had the good fortune to come in direct contact with him. But when I first rested my eyes on him, he looked to be quite an ordinary sanyasin. He talked, laughed and behaved just like other men. 'Religion is not abnormality,' I heard the Swamiji once remark to a certain gentleman. In fact, there was nothing abnormal about the Swamiji. But for that majestic voice that carried conviction with it and those sparkling eyes which seemed to penetrate into the innermost recesses of your souls, there was nothing about the Swamiji to mark him out from the ordinary run of sadhus. A peculiar light ever shone in those vigilant eyes, the scrutiny of which nothing could possibly escape. They were indeed the eyes of a spiritual detective. No wonder, therefore, that hyprocrites trembled before him.

On the very day of the Swamiji's arrival at Ottapalam, we had an instance of how his piercing eyes could at once see through the mask of hypocricy. A young man had come to pay his respects to the Swamiji. He could discourse on religious subjects with fluency which compelled admiration. The public were quite enamoured of his speeches and thought that there was a brilliant spiritual future in store for him. That

was the first time, however, that the Swamiji had set his eyes on him. And yet, immediately the man took his departure when the Swamiji said, That young man did not impress me at all', and reminded us of the saying of Gurumaharaj, beware of him whose words flow like water'. Sufficient to say that the subsequent conduct of the man justified the Swamiji's observation and the public had occasion to see the real nature of the man revealed in all its sordidness.

The Swamiji appeared to be a born leader. He looked imperious and carried himself like one in authority. But there was not the slightest vestige of false pride in him. When the Swamiji's arrival was announced, many people asked me who he was. I told them that he was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. A leading vakil of the place came to see the Swamiji and greeted him thus:-' I hear, Swami, that you are a sabrahmachari of Vivekananda.' At once came the reply, 'Sir,I am a devoted servant of his – a servant of his servants.' The vakil turned to me in blank astonishment, and, of course, I had to explain to him what the Swamiji meant. Such was the Swamiji's humility and devotion to Sri Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

A bolder sanyasin than the Swamiji I have never been able to meet. He did what he thought was right, and never paused to consider what people would say or think about it. The true mettle of the monk exhibited itself in the supreme indifference with which he regarded what worldlings said or would say about him. Never would he pander to the whims or crotchets of others so that he might have a larger following. A Brahmin teacher of the local High School who had a high opinion of his spiritual attainments and who thought it an honour to entertain sanyasins came and invited the Swamiji for bhiksha. He began by saying that Swami Sharvananda was his guest when he visited Ottapalam. There was a merry twinkle in the eyes of the Swamiji, but he simply said: "I am at the disposal of so and so. I can think of other invitations only if he is tired of me". I undersood the hint and the gentleman went away disappointed.

The next day, however, he came again. The conversation turned upon orhodoxy and the gentleman said something, I forget what, insinuating that it was not proper on the Swami's part to have declined the invitation of a man belonging to a caste superior to the Swami's host in myself. The Swami thought that it was a good opportunity to give the gentleman a piece of his mind. He said he cared a rotten reed for caste; he cared for sincerity only. He asked why the Lord Krishna preferred to be the

guest of Vidura, a *Sudra*, when so many *Kshatriya* chieftains had invited him. In winding up the topic, the Swami remarked that according to the ancient *Shastras*, a *Brahmin* could not stoop to cook his own meal; it had to be done for him by others. The *Kshatriyas* of old entertained *Sudras* as cooks and the remnant of the old custom is still seen in some old *Kshatriya* families still retaining a barber as head-cook.

The Swamiji was nothing if he was not bold and fearless, as bold in words as in deeds. If religious cranks came to him, he snubbed them without remorse. A so-called spiritual enthusiast came to see him. I then happened to be engaged in some work. The man knew only Malayalam, but somehow signified his desire to have a talk with the Swami. I was sent for to act as interpreter. There stood the young man before the Swami, his eyes rolled up, his lips moving, presumably the outward manifestation of the process of uttering some *mantram*. The Swami looked amused at first. After a while, when he had given the Swami a detailed account of how he was spending his life, how he could go without meals for days together, how he had conquered sleep and felt no need for it, he wanted Swami's advice as to how he should proceed further with his *sadhanas*.

'My advice to you, young man', said the Swami, 'is to go home, apply some nice, cooling oil to your head, have a good bath in cold water, eat nutritious food and sleep well at night. That is the *sadhana* you now require'. The man was evidently disappointed and after he had taken his departure, the Swami observed with pain in his voice:'I am really sorry for that young man. He is heading for the lunatic asylum and if he does not do as I suggested, he would ere long be the inmate of a mental hospital. Would you believe it, reader, that young man is now a roaring lunatic!

Yet another enthusiast came. His crotchet was *Pranayama*. He requested the Swami to give him instructions as regards breathing exercise. The Swami said gravely: 'My friend, religion does not consist in inflating the lungs with air. If that were so, footballs would be the greatest *Yogis* in the world'. This is only one instance of the summary way in which Swamiji dismissed persons who sought instructions with ulterior motives or went in quest of short-cuts to heaven without performing the difficult task of character - moulding.

Such were some of the incidents which enlivened the days of the Swami's stay at Ottapalam. And such days were many. Every year, on

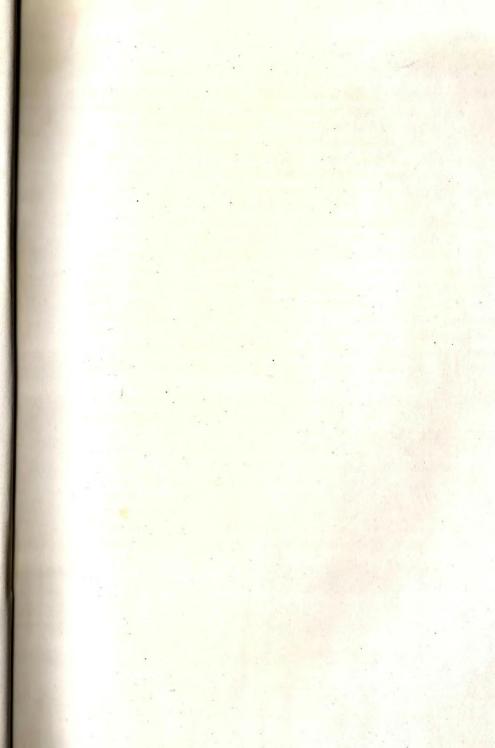
his way to and from Travancore, the Swamiji used to halt at Ottapalam and be my guest during his many happy sojourns there from 1914 to 1926 till the opening of the Ashrama. Synchronising with it, another event was taking shape in North Malabar, the transfer of ownership to the Ramakrishna Mission of the Yoga Mutt of Quilandy. It was a place of worship dedicated to the War-Lord and Yogi, Skanda. There was a small habitation attached to it where wandering sadhus found shelter. The institution had come into being with the help of public funds and the exertions of a retired member of the local bar, by name Mr. K.P. Krishnan Nair, who lived in the Mutt and managed it. He had been invited by Mr. Kunhiraman Menon to meet the Swami at Badagara. He was very much impressed with the views, aims, objects and methods of work of the Ramakrishna Mission as explained by the Swami. Ever since, he had the idea that the objects of the Mutt would be best served by giving it over to the Ramakrishna Mission. He told Mr. Menon of his laudable intention. Mr. Menon ascertained from the Swami that he was prepared to take it up. At a public meeting held in April 1914, it was resolved to hand over the Mutt to the Mission. A deed was accordingly drawn up and registered in the name of the President Maharai.

Swamiji left Ottapalam for Haripad which he reached on the 6th of April 1914. On the 10th, the birthday of Sri Ramakrishna was celebrated on the grandest possible scale. The next day a large number of Panchamas came to pay their respects to Swamiji and a Panchama boy was dedicated to the cause of Sri Ramakrishna. The Swami remained in the Ashrama for some days, teaching and training Brahmacharins and disciples. And he laboured hard at it. Nothing was overlooked as small. In fact, with him, there was nothing small in life, no parts in perfection; life was one indivisible whole and a perfect life must be perfect in all its phases, in all its actions, however trivial or insignificant they might be in the eyes of the world.



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SWAMI NIRMALANANDA; HIS LIFE AND MISSION

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Hereafter, the work of all institutions and the life of all nations will be moulded in Ramakrishna fashion. Politics and Government and all such things will have to pass through that mould, viz.; Ramakrishna. I may not live to see all those wonderful happenings. The next generation will see it. The power of Ramakrishna is now in its infancy, just beginning to spread. That mighty power will take years to fully manifest itself and to envelop the world. All things will be pervaded, devoured by it. The effulgence of Sri Ramakrishna will permeate everything. There will be no Ramakrishna or Religion of Ramakrishna. There is no question of sectarianism at all. His spirit will be accepted by all."

- Swami Nirmalananda



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